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THE NEW YORKER

SEPT. 18, 2000

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SEPTEMBER 18, 2000

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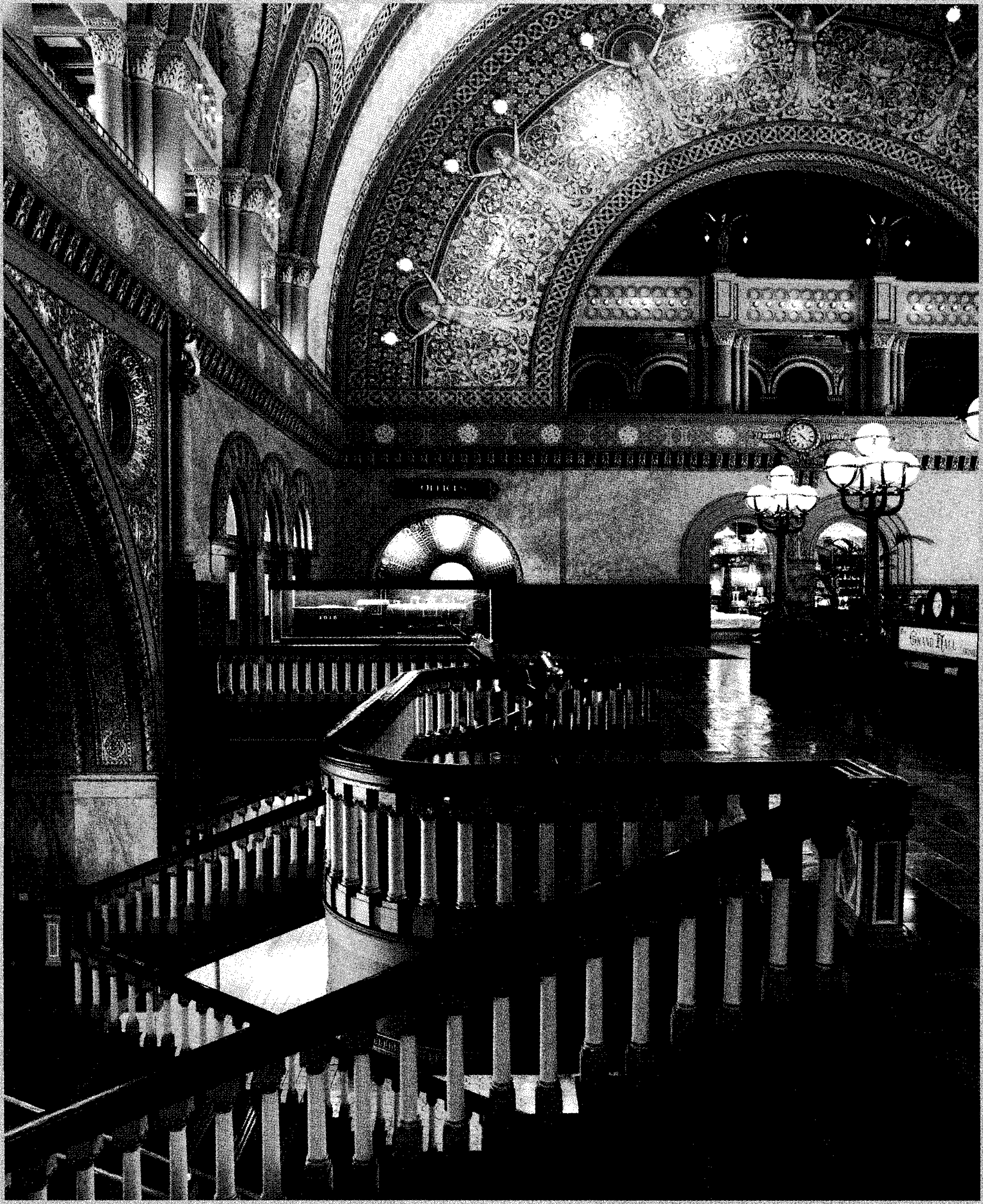

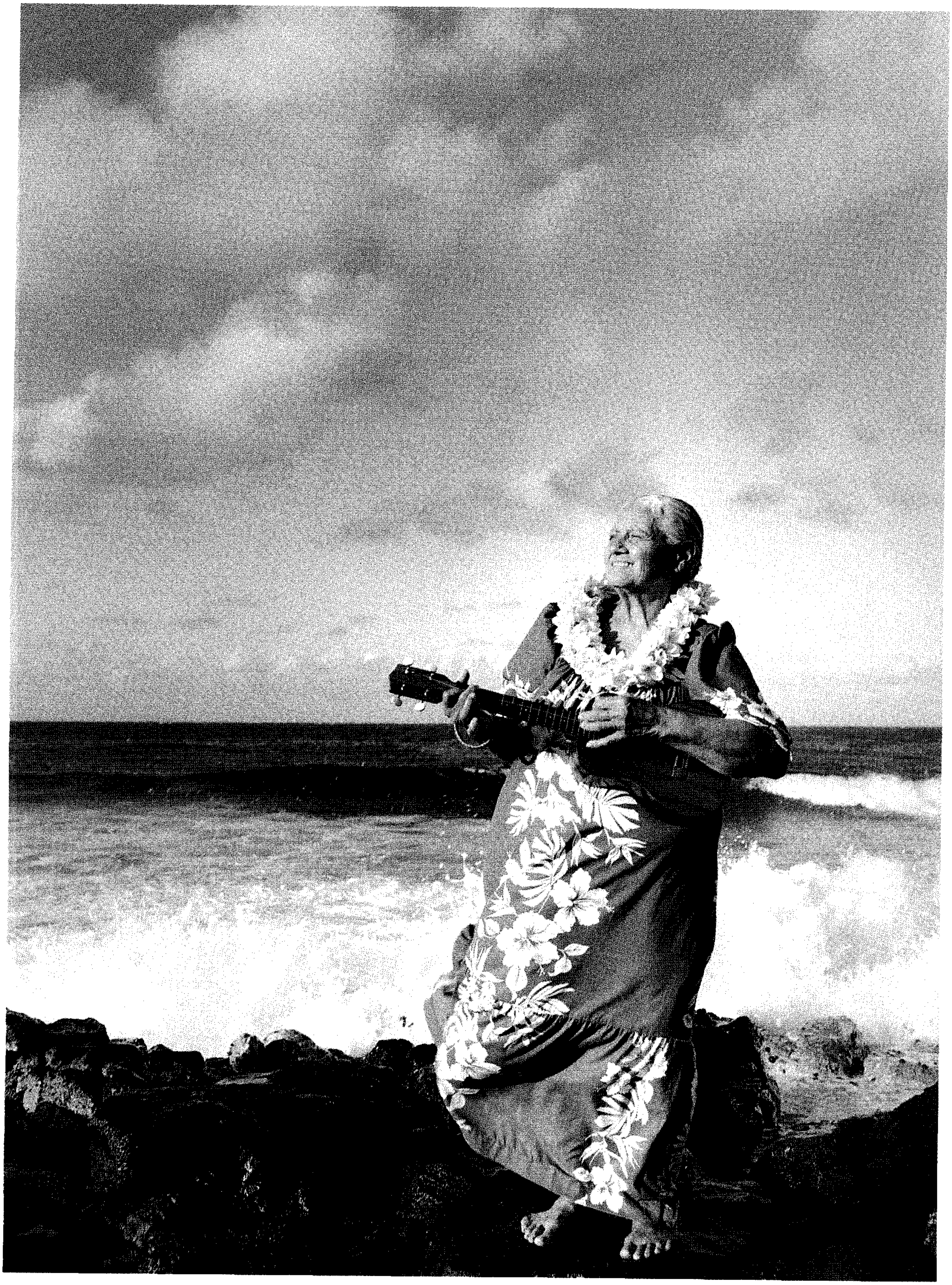

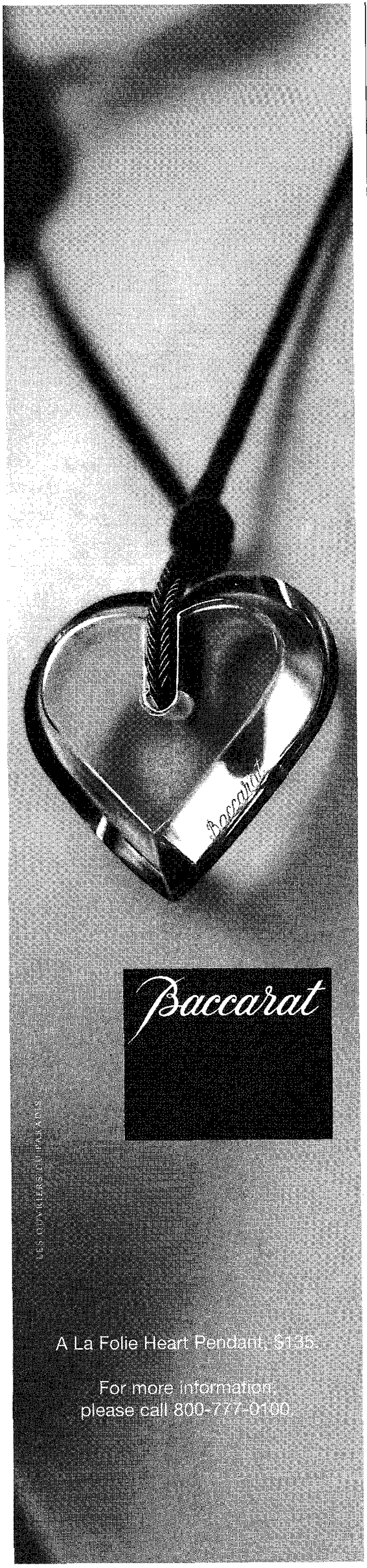

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CONTRIBUTORS

John Seabrook ("The Invisible Designer," p. 114) is a staff writer. His latest book is "Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing—The Marketing of Culture."

Susan Orlean ("Game Plan," p. 96) will publish "The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup," a collection of her articles, in January.

Richard Ford (Fiction, p. 136) is the author of two collections of short stories and five novels, among them "The Sportswriter" and "Independence Day," for which he won a Pulitzer Prize in 1996.

Rebecca Mead (Books, p. 146) has been a staff writer since 1997.

Michael Roberts (Cover) is the magazine's fashion editor. His second children's book, "Mumbo Jumbo," will be published in October.

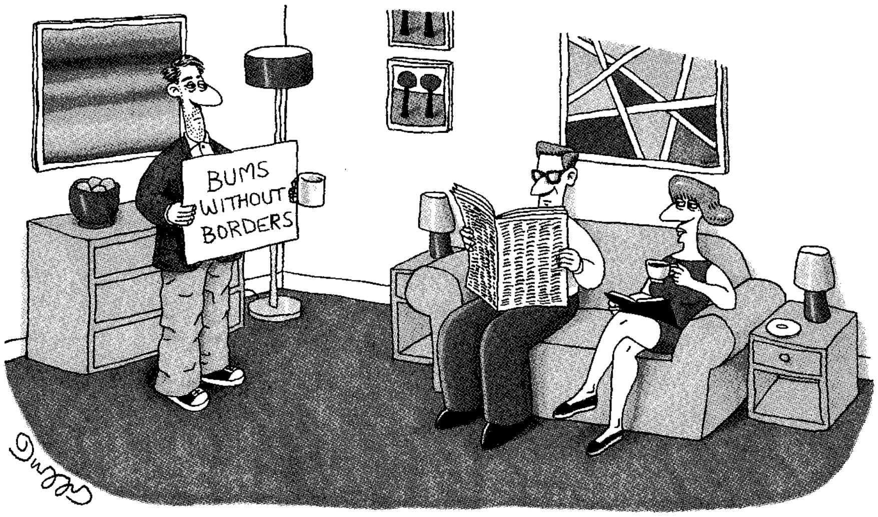
Jeffrey Toobin ("Adventures in Buddhism," p. 76) is the author of "A Vast Conspiracy," about the impeachment of President Clinton, which will come out in paperback next month.

Ian Parker ("Hot Flashes," p. 104) has been contributing to the magazine since 1994.

Arthur Elgort (Portfolio, p. 124) has been a fashion photographer since the early seventies. He has published four books, including "Camera Ready."

Hilton Als (Portfolio, p. 126) is the author of "The Women," a book about race and gender.

Mark Ulriksen (Illustrations, pp. 118-119) has been a contributor since 1993. His book "Urban Legends" will be published next spring. ♦



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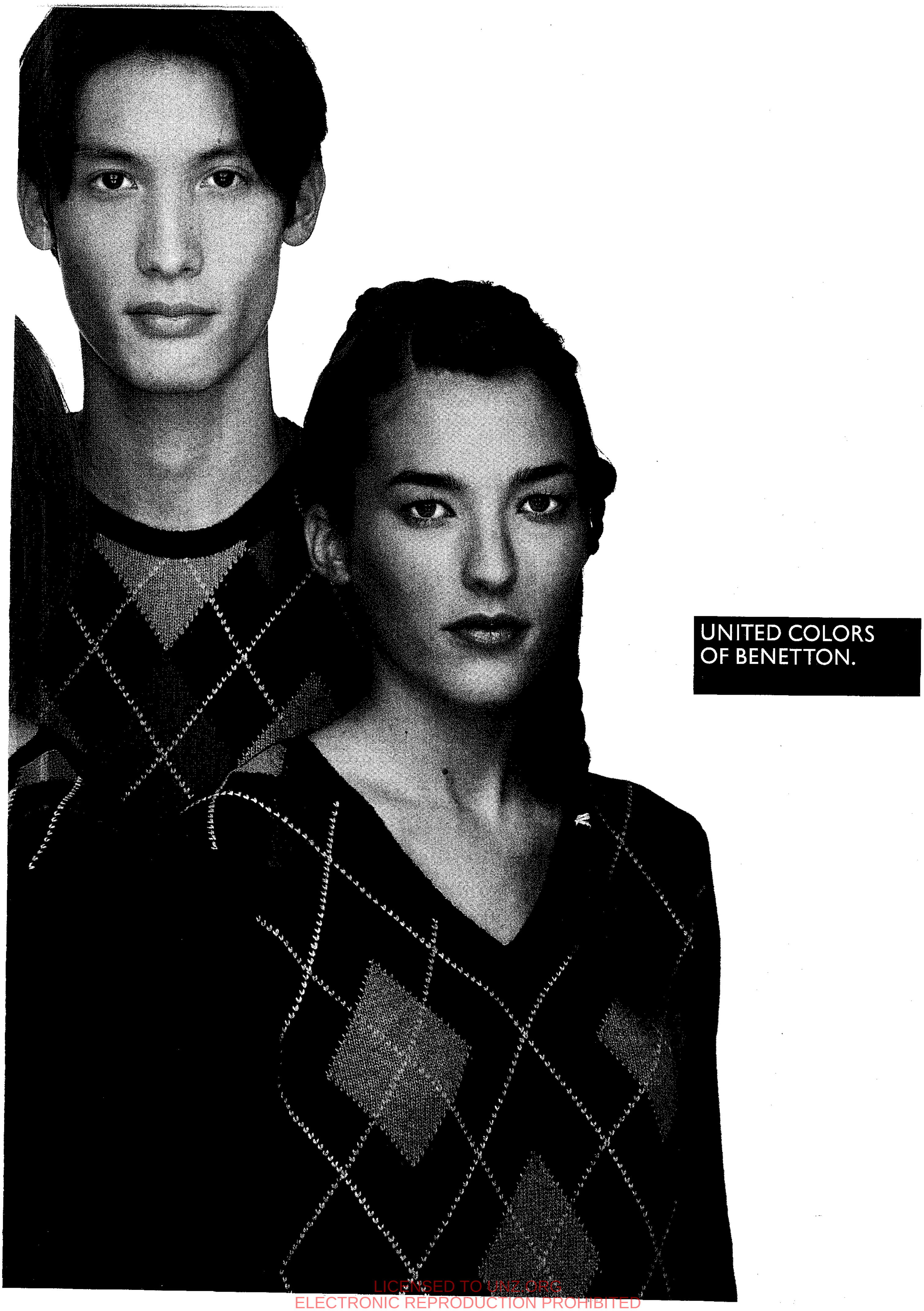
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THE MAIL

THE TIGER TRAP

The threat that Tiger Woods's monotonous dominance poses to the game of golf—who wants to devote a day to watching a foregone conclusion?—may be even more imminent than David Owen fears ("The Chosen One," August 21st & 28th). Scott Dunlap, the golfer who briefly, and unexpectedly, tied Woods for the lead in last month's P.G.A. championship, said that "his presence is nothing more than discouraging for the rest of the field." Tiger Woods is the master of paradox: despite all his efforts to encourage young people to take up golf, he may have a deadening effect on the sport at its highest levels.

Paul Embler
Portland, Oreg.

FALLING DOWN

How dare Malcolm Gladwell state unequivocally that John F. Kennedy, Jr., "failed under pressure," or panicked during his last flight ("The Art of Failure," August 21st & 28th)? He cannot know that. The idea that one can apply a perfectly valid sports theory to a matter of life and death is incredible. This leap from speculation to supposed fact is an insult to Kennedy, and painful for his family and friends, who have to read this psychobabble. Next time, pick on someone who is around to defend himself.

Christiane Amanpour
London, England

Gladwell's discussion of the three "N"s of choking—Novotna, Norman, and Knoblauch—helps to explain why some people panic while others choke. His description of panic as a reversion to instinct also illuminates two incidents that appear elsewhere in the Sports Issue: David Cone's throwing home instead of making an inning-ending double play, in his desperation not to give up yet another run ("Tales of the Bronx," by Roger Angell), and Mike Tyson's biting Holyfield's ear when he realized he was losing ("Cornerman," by David Remnick). Too much time to think leads to choking, which is why opposing coaches call time-outs before a critical foul shot. Too little time leads to panic, which is the purpose of the blitz, the press, and the trap.

Isaac Steven Herschkopf, M.D.
New York City

MONEY AND HORSES

Twenty-five years ago, I was a young rider in Charlottesville, on the wrong side of the class divide Larissa MacFarquhar describes in her piece on the town's moneyed riding culture ("Horse Country," August 21st & 28th). I couldn't afford a horse of my own, but I earned what to me seemed the privilege of breaking in new ponies for my instructor. Rather than admiring me for taking on such tough, risky work, "St. Anne's girls" like those MacFarquhar talked to ostracized me for being too poor to buy a horse or attend their private school. They heckled me at horse shows, and their cattiness and cruelty drove me to the point where I couldn't face going to the stables anymore. I quit the sport I loved; MacFarquhar's article reminded me why.

Diana Shaw Clark
Cambridge, Mass.

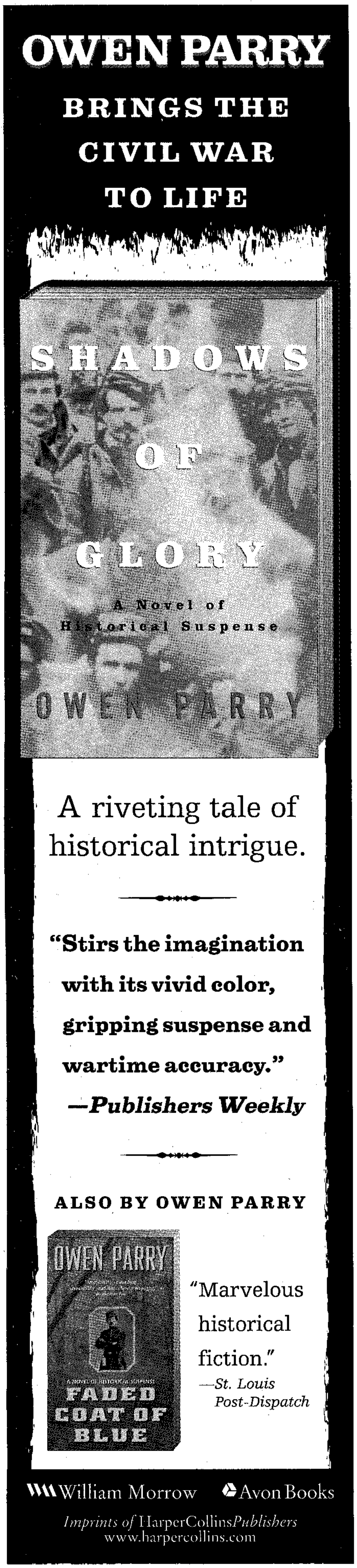
THE NEW GERMAN PROBLEM

That the Germans were tragically inept in their handling of the events leading to the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics is incontrovertible (A Critic at Large, by David Denby, August 21st & 28th). These "new" Germans, through the difficult process of coming to terms with the past, had learned not to be aggressive or militaristic. As a result, they were less capable of responding forcefully to the terrorists—who knew it. This is the damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't dilemma of postwar Germany.

Eric Langenbacher
Washington, D.C.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.



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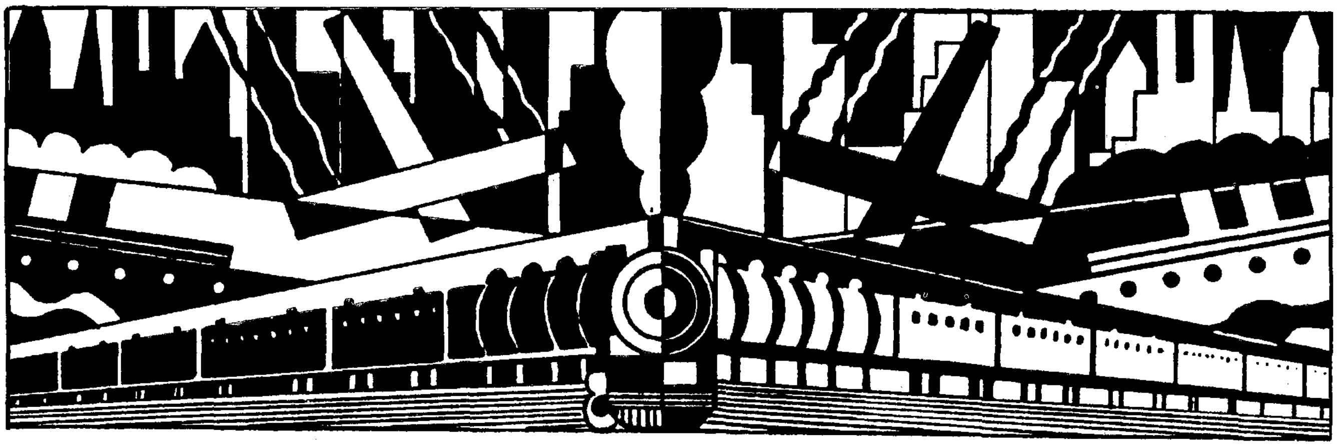


THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			13	14	15	16
17	18	19				

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
The latest edition of Gerard Alessandrini's ongoing musical satire of the players and the plays along the Great White Way. In previews. (Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.)

GORE VIDAL'S THE BEST MAN
A revival of Vidal's 1960 political drama, starring Charles Durning, Spalding Gray, Chris Noth, Elizabeth Ashley, Christine Ebersole, and Michael Learned, among others. Directed by Ethan McSweeny. In previews through Sept. 16. Opens Sept. 17 at 7:30. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

THE IMMIGRANT
A musical version of Mark Harelik's 1985 play, about a Russian Jewish immigrant who is befriended by a Baptist couple in a small Texas town. With lyrics by Sarah Knapp and music by Steven M. Alper. Randal Myler is the director. Previews Sept. 13-18. Opens Sept. 19 at 8 and runs through Oct. 7. (CAP21 Theatre, 15 W. 28th St. 279-4200.)

LIFEGAME
A show by the British troupe Improbable Theatre, in which a different onstage guest's life story becomes the basis of the drama each night. In previews. (Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

SIGNATURE THEATRE COMPANY
This year the company presents a season of new plays by various authors, beginning with "A Lesson Before Dying," Romulus Linney's stage adaptation of the novel by Ernest J. Gaines. In previews through Sept 16. Opens Sept. 17 at 6:30. (555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AIDA
Disney's new musical—five years in the making and a product of Pharaonic expense—is, if not perfect, a lively, polished entertainment with bursts of joyful flamboyance worthy of its composer, Elton John. The two female leads—Heather Headley, as Aida, and Sherie René Scott, as Amneris—shine in their different ways, and Bob Crowley's brilliant sets give the show both visual dazzle and emotional resonance. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/10/00.) (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.)

AND GOD CREATED GREAT WHALES
An encore engagement of Rinde Eckert's musical-theatre work, in which a composer with a degenerative disease struggles to finish an opera based on "Moby Dick." (45 Bleecker Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

AQUILA THEATRE COMPANY
The British-American touring troupe continues its New York residency with Rostand's "Cyrano de Bergerac." (Clark Studio, Lincoln Center. 279-4200. Closes Sept. 17.)

BERLIN TO BROADWAY WITH KURT WEILL
A revue celebrating the composer's career, starring Lorinda Lisitza, Bjørn Olsson, Michael Winther, and Veronica Mittenzwei. (The Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 279-4200.)

BLITHE SPIRIT
Noel Coward's 1941 comedy is the Pearl Theatre Company's season opener. (80 St. Mark's Pl. 598-9802.)

BOXING 2000
From Richard Maxwell, a fable about two half-brothers training for the ring. (Present Company Theatorium, 196 Stanton St. 420-8877.)

COPENHAGEN
Michael Frayn's play speculates on the controversial 1941 reunion of the two giants of quantum mechanics—the physicists Niels Bohr (Philip Bosco) and Werner Heisenberg (Michael Cumpsty). It is so meticulous, so admirable, and so grave that you want to tousle its well-kempt appearance and tell it to lighten up. Nevertheless, the director, Michael Blakemore, manages to make dynamic and suggestive an evening that consists of three actors (Blair Brown plays Margrethe Bohr) and three chairs. (4/24 & 5/1/00) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE CRADLE WILL ROCK
The Jean Cocteau Rep opens the season with Marc Blitzstein's 1937 labor-movement musical. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

THE CRUMPLE ZONE
A dark comedy by Buddy Thomas, set during a Christmas gathering of five gay men. (Rattlestick Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl. 206-1515.)

DIRTY BLONDE
Mae West's flirty and dirty persona is the subject of a cunningly written, raffish evening conceived by the writer-actress Claudia Shear and the director James Lapine. Mae's story is recounted with brio by two fans—Jo (Shear, who doubles winningly as Mae) and Charlie (Tom Riis Farrell).The success of the play rests not on the louche facts of West's life but on the intersection of her story with the sweetness of the evolving relationship between the two lost souls who narrate it. (2/7/00) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

DON JUAN IN HELL
Donal Donnelly, Celeste Holm, James A. Stephens, and Fritz Weaver give a dramatic reading of the third-act dream scene from Shaw's "Man and Superman," under the direction of Charlotte Moore. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Sept. 17.)

GODSPELL
An updated version of the 1971 rock musical, with music and new lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

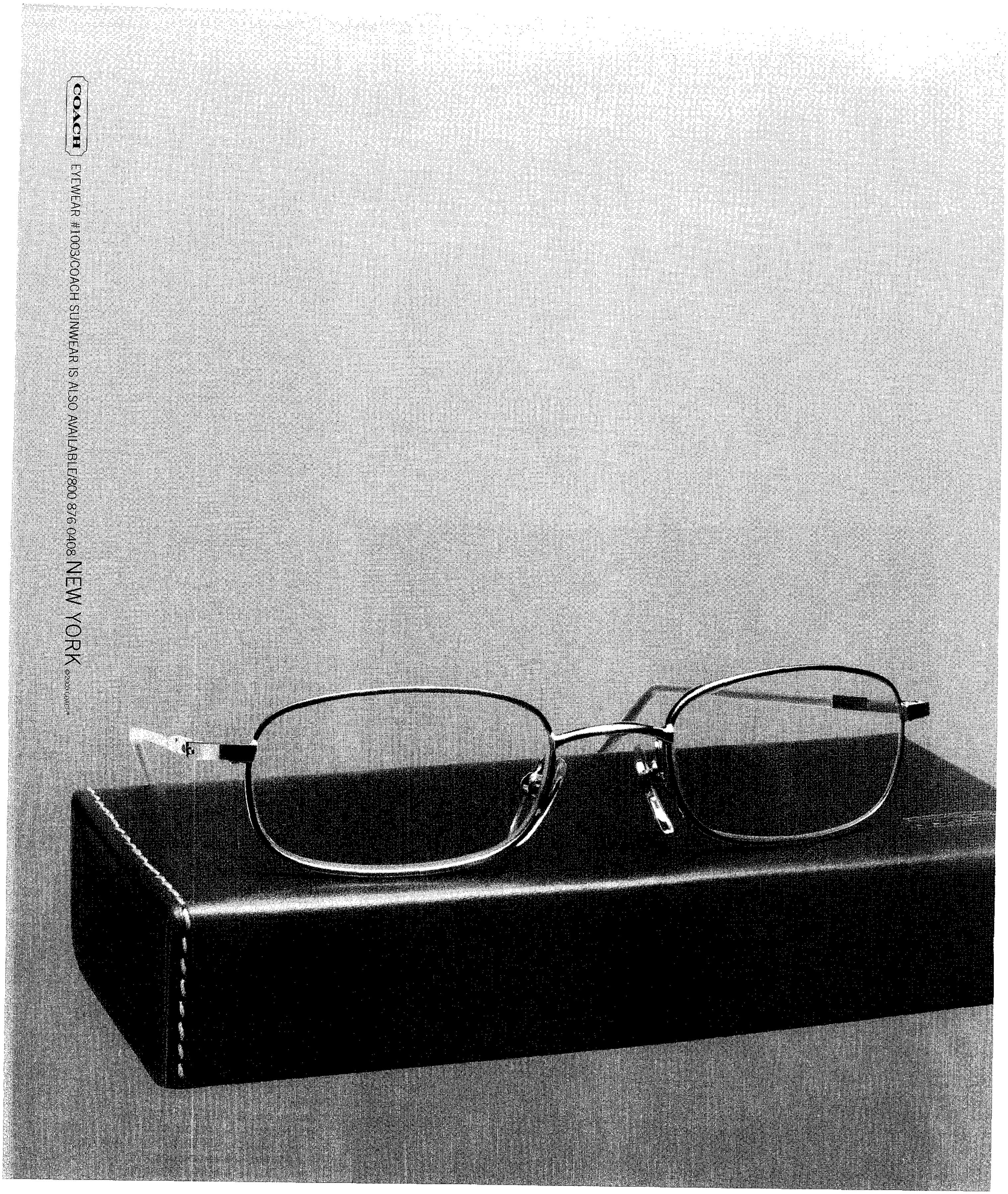
IMPERFECT CHEMISTRY
A musical comedy by Albert M. Tapper and James Racheff, about two geneticists at a philanthropic laboratory who are seduced into finding a cure for baldness. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave. between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

IT AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES
A revue tracing the history of the musical form, which had its New York première at the New Victory Theatre in 1999. With Charles Bevel, Carter Calvert, Debra Laws, Gregory Porter, Cheryl Alexander, and Michael Mandell. Jim Ehinger is the musical director. (B. B. King Blues Club & Grill, 243 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

THE JERUSALEM SYNDROME
The comic Marc Maron is fully aware of all the dubious idols that have replaced God in our culture, and he pulls no punches in pointing them out. In his one-man show, a heartbreakingly funny, faux-naïf travelogue, he leads the audience into purgatory and back, as he tries to find some kind of spiritual resonance in Hollywood fame, cigarettes, the Wiz, Coke (and coke), and Israel, where, he claims, he just wasn't "Jewy" enough to achieve the transcendence the land offers to the less materialistic. Maron may not be the Messiah, but he's definitely the guy to tell you where you won't find Him. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391.)

LYPSINKA! THE BOXED SET
The star (a.k.a. John Epperson) makes her first concert appearance in seven years. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 206-1515. Closes Sept. 24.)

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER
The Roundabout's revival of Kaufman and Hart's evergreen 1939 satire of Hollywood and of New York literary society is pure gold. Nathan Lane is back onstage where he belongs, playing Sheridan Whiteside, a noxiously pompous critic and radio personality who commandeers the bewildered family and staff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of a staid Ohio household—where he slipped on ice after a dinner in his honor and ended up in a wheelchair. The play itself is a model of comic construction and is chock-full of vintage stage business, which the excellent cast executes with gleeful nineteen-forties snap. Jean Smart, Byron Jennings, and Lewis J. Stadlen, as three famous personalities who pop in for a visit, are all brilliant. Jerry Zaks is the director. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

THE MUSIC MAN
A delightful revival of Meredith Willson's 1957 musical, directed by Susan Stroman and starring Craig Bierko, who is making his Broadway début in the role of Professor Harold Hill. The show hits us with the simplicity and seamlessness of a perfect fairy tale, and it puts music in its proper place—right up there with all the other miracles of life. (5/22/00) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

RICHARD II / CORIOLANUS
Ralph Fiennes and Linus Roache lead the casts in repertory performances of Shakespeare's plays, staged by London's Almeida Theatre Company. Jonathan Kent is the director. "Richard II" runs through Oct. 1. "Coriolanus" runs through Sept. 30. (Reviewed in this issue.) (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

RIVERDANCE
The Irish troupe of dancers, singers, and musicians. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER
John Travolta is not easy to replace, nor are the ashes of disco fever likely to reignite, as this show, based on the 1977 movie, demonstrates. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SOUL OF AN INTRUDER
A psychological thriller by Steve Braunstein, about a triangle between a woman and two of her former lovers, who come back into her life at the same time. (Theatre 3, at 311 W. 43rd St. 279-4200. Closes Sept. 30.)

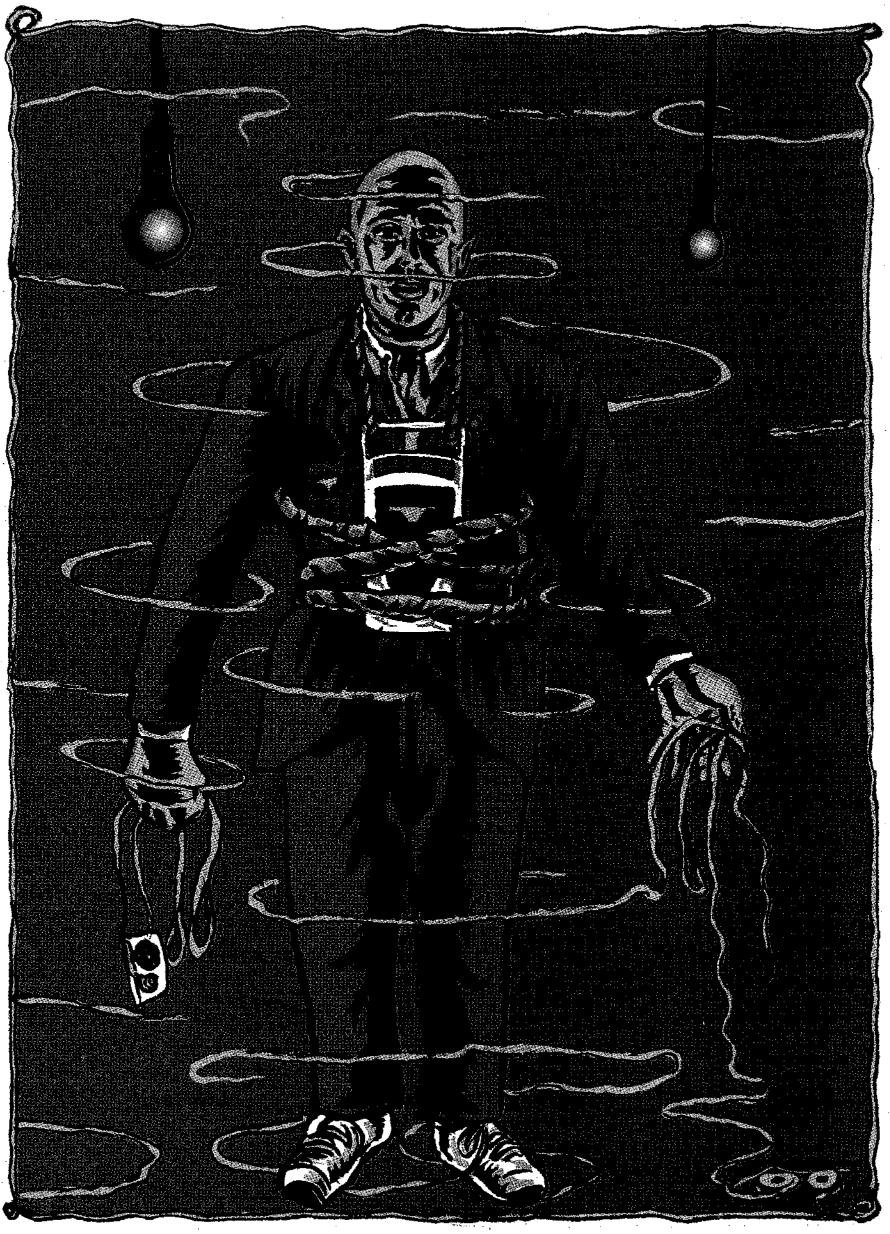
SPINNING INTO BUTTER
Rebecca Gilman's surprising, well-crafted play about a racist incident at a mostly white Vermont liberal-arts college, where, as one character puts it, "not being racist means you got along really well with your nanny." When someone pins a hate letter on the door of one of the school's only black students, the administration stumbles around in a comically paranoid, disturbing stupor, trying to keep the public-relations lid on and obliviously applying righteous public-forum Band-Aids to a gaping social wound. The drama is subtle, yet more powerful than it seems at first: the audience never meets the wronged black student, and the only honest feelings about racial divisiveness are expressed out of range of the censoring ear of inept authority. Hope Davis, who delivers a genuinely troubled monologue as a dean of students, leads the fine cast. Daniel Sullivan is the director. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes Sept. 16.)

STREET OF BLOOD
From the Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes, a "prairie gothic epic" that examines bloodlust, religion, AIDS, and celebrity worship, among other topics. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79A E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

WELCOME TO OUR CITY
Thomas Wolfe's rarely produced, controversial play about race (it originally called for white actors in blackface) was written in 1923, while he was a student at Harvard. (Mint Theatre, 311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231.)

WHERE EVERYTHING IS EVERYTHING
Daisy Eagan and Paul Sparks portray a shy graphic designer and a brash financial consultant, in a romance by Stephen Spoonamore. (New York Performance Works, 128 Chambers St. 539-8892.)

WHY WE DON'T BOMB THE AMISH
A one-woman comedy skewering cultural hypocrisies, written and performed by Casey Fraser, and accompanied by a band performing jazz, blues, funk, and hard-core punk. (Gershwin Hotel, 7 E. 27th St. 279-4200.)



Rinde Eckert, in "And God Created Great Whales."

DAVID SANDLIN

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

THE COUNTESS
Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 997-1780.

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.

THE FANTASTICKS
Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

FULLY COMMITTED
Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.

I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

JEKYLL & HYDE
Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

KISS ME, KATE
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477.

SWING
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

"THE MUKISHI"
Batoto Yetu, a Harlem-based troupe of young dancers trained in traditional African dance, presents the story of a boy's spiritual journey, undertaken to protect his town. The full-length work, based on beliefs of the Luba tribe in Angola, was directed and

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choreographed by Júlio Leitão. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Sept. 15 at 7, Sept. 16 at 2 and 7, and Sept. 17 at noon and 5. Through Sept. 24.)

"EVENING STARS: 2000 DANCE SERIES"
The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council presents a weeklong series of free dance performances, all of which begin at 7, at the World Trade Center Plaza. Sept 13: Trisha Brown Dance Company. ♦ Sept. 14: American Repertory Ballet. ♦ Sept. 15: Parsons Dance Company. ♦ Sept. 16: Works performed by members of the following companies: American Ballet Theatre, San Francisco Ballet, Sean Curran Company, Ellis Wood Dance, and RhythMEK. (For more information, call 435-6600.)

"DANCENOW DOWNTOWN"
The sixth annual festival acts as a sort of welcome back for dancers (who, if they're lucky, have been off performing in woodland or seaside resorts) and kicks off the new season with a choreographic gallimaufry, with more than a hundred and fifty troupes and soloists at four venues. Sept. 13 at 7 and 8: Clare Byrne Dance, Stuart Hodes and Alice Tierstein, Lawrence Keigwin, and twelve other acts. (OK Harris gallery, 383 West Broadway.) ♦ Sept. 14 at 7: Guta Hedwig Dance and Incidents in Physical Theatre, among others. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St.) ♦ Sept. 14 at 9: Buglisi/Foreman Dance, Tiffany Mills, Jody Sperling, and others. (Joyce SoHo.) ♦ Sept. 15 at 9: Amos Pinchasi, Mark Jarecke Dance, Athena Malloy, and more. (Joyce SoHo.) ♦ Sept. 16 at 2:30: Jill Sigman/Thinkdance, Emily Fraenkel, Johanna Mendl Shaw, and other troupes. (By the outdoor pool, Carmine Center, Seventh Ave. S. at Clarkson St.) ♦ Sept. 16 at 2: Doug Elkins/Susan Moran & Allen Tibbets, Rebecca Stenn/Perks Music Dance Theatre, and others. (On the basketball court, Carmine Center.) ♦ Sept. 16 at 8:30: Sara Hook and David Parker, Nai-Ni Chen and Dancers, Chamecki/Lerner, Nicholas Leichter & Dancers, and others. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, 7 E. 7th St.) (For more information, see www.dancenow.org or call 917-930-4327. Through Sept. 16.)

REGGIE WILSON/FIST & HEEL PERFORMANCE GROUP
The eight-member troupe performs "Wangena—the Birthday Concerts," created by the choreographer to celebrate his thirty-third birthday; "Rise, Sally, Rise," a trio for three women; "Vanity-starts@Home," a solo for Wilson; "Jumpin' the Broom"; and other works. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Sept. 13-14 and Sept. 16 at 8. Through Sept. 30.)

"SLAY THE DRAGON"
The choreographer Jody Oberfelder puts her six dancers through an acrobatic series of tests in a work about facing down fear. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St. 226-2407. Sept. 14-16 at 8. Through Oct. 7.)

LES SPECTACLES VIVANTS
A sampling from the Centre Pompidou's avant-garde performance series includes sixty short pieces, all lasting a minute or less, by Grand Magasin; a multi-genre composition (including classical, experimental, and club dance) by composer David Shea; and works by choreographers Xavier Le Roy and Claudia Triozzi. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 225-5793, ext. 11. Sept. 14-16 at 7:30.)

"PYGMALION"
The New York Baroque Dance Company performs Jean-Philippe Rameau's *acte de ballet* about the statue who comes to life and, in this version, performs a contredanse and other company specialties. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. Sept. 16 at 2 and 8 and Sept. 17 at 2.)

"THE BESSIES"
The New York Dance and Performance Awards—called the Bessies, after Bessie Schoenberg, whose advice and critiques helped generations of dancers develop their work—bestows honors on choreographers, performers, composers, lighting designers, and others whose work over the past season (or, in some cases, throughout a career) has been judged exceptional. The ceremonies often rival the performances they reward (last year, the straight-faced host Ann Carlson presented a portion of the awards entirely nude); this year, David Dorfman and Dan Froot (who have been known to appear in the buff themselves) host the event, which will feature performances by Sarah East Johnson and her company, Lava; Herbin (Tamango) Van Cayseele's Urban Tap; and the vocal group Straylight. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 924-0077. Sept. 15 at 7.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

NEW SOUNDS LIVE/NEW YORK GUITAR FESTIVAL
John Renbourn, Gary Lucas, and **Toshi Reagon** offer a tribute to the scarifying blues of Robert Johnson. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Sept. 14 at 8.)

DANIELA MERCURY
This stunning Brazilian cut her teeth singing from the backs of roving sound trucks during the carnival season and, more recently, opening for David Byrne. Her material is based on *axé* music (a drum-driven genre from Bahia), but it also incorporates elements of samba, rock, and jazz. (Roxy, 515 W. 18th St. 307-7171. Sept. 14 at 9.)

THE MARK WHITFIELD QUARTET
A young guitarist with chops to spare, Whitfield has the funky fluidity of an early, pre-pop George Benson and a flair for gospel and blues. (Rose Center for Earth and Space, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. 769-5100. Sept. 15 at 5:45 and 7:15.)

B. B. KING BLUES FESTIVAL 2000
The master himself (who celebrates his seventy-fifth birthday tonight), along with his longtime six-stringed companion, Lucille, headlines a seaside blues showdown, with the incendiary **Buddy Guy** and relative youngsters **Susan Tedeschi** and **Corey Harris.** (Jones Beach Theatre. 516-221-1000. Sept. 16 at 6:30.)

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TIM MC GRAW / FAITH HILL
A comely double bill featuring two of country music's biggest new stars. McGraw is still probably best known as the son of the baseball pitcher Tug McGraw, but his last record, 1999's "Place in the Sun," shows real growth and a genuine gift for high-lonesome prairie ballads. / Though Hill has yet to ascend to the success level of crossover goddesses such as Shania Twain, her 1999 "Breathe" has now sold three million copies. With one more twangy hit, she could easily wind up as the biggest star in popular music. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Sept. 16 at 8.)

TONY BENNETT / DIANA KRALL
Is Bennett a jazz singer? When you swing with as much gusto as this sixty-four-year-old legend does, the question is moot. Bennett's still at the top of his game, and the onstage interplay he establishes with his responsive trio is a joy to behold. / Krall's success remains an amazement; how did an understated vocalist with exceptional taste and musicianship become so popular in an age of blaring divas with only tangential links to jazz? (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Sept. 16 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
243 W. 42nd St. (269-4849)—Sept. 14: New York City native **John Hammond,** who's been keeping country blues alive for nearly forty years. Sept. 15: **Shemekia Copeland** may be the daughter of the guitar legend Johnny Copeland, but she's a powerhouse singer in her own right.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Sept. 14: The guitarist **Chris Whitley** gets a little help from the former Soul Coughing rhythm section, the bassist Sebastian Steinberg and the drummer Yuval Gaby. Sept. 19-20: **The The.** This one-man band led by the British songwriter Matt Johnson, a snarling Byron with a voice oddly reminiscent of Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson, offered some of the better-crafted compositions of the eighties. Johnson is hard to pigeonhole, however (he once did an album called "Hanky Panky," a collection of Hank Williams covers). Last year, after missing most of the nineties, Johnson produced the tragically overlooked "Nakedself," on Nothing Records, the industrially inclined boutique label run by Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails. Though "Nakedself" lacks the skeletal melodicism of earlier The The classics, it's the sort of complicated, grownup affair you might expect half a decade of brooding to produce.

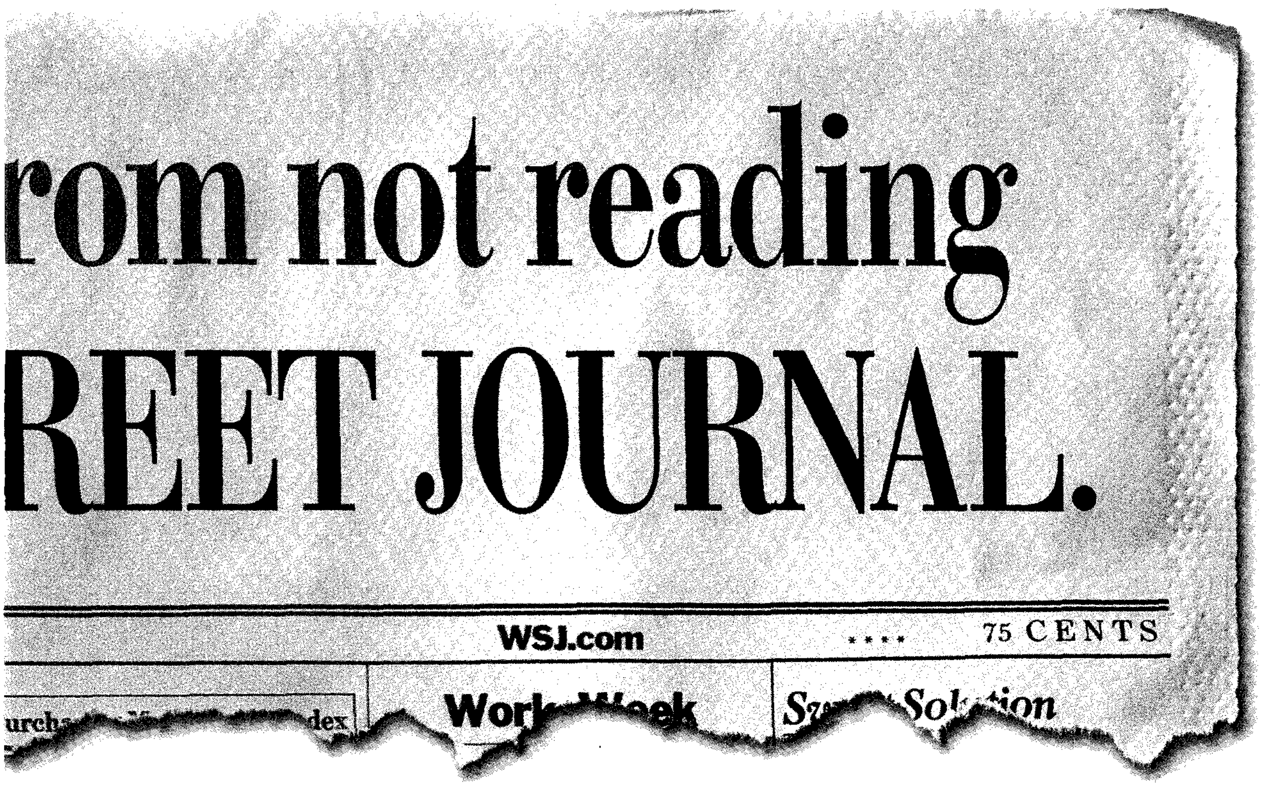
BROWNIES
169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Sept. 14: Brooklyn-based dub master **Dr. Israel** shares the stage with **Ari,** the former lead singer of the seminal punk band the Slits. Sept. 16: The gimlet-eyed songcraft of **A Don Piper Situation.** With **Champale,** singer-songwriter Mark Rozzo's unusually flexible and inventive ensemble. Sept. 17: The fiery antics of the **World/Inferno Friendship Society.** With **Radio 4,** which does a fine job of updating the post-punk sounds of the Clash and Gang of Four.

CHICAGO B.L.U.E.S.
73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Sept. 15-16: **Son Seals.** One of the leading figures of post-sixties blues, this son of an Arkansas juke-joint operator plays in the slashing, urgent style of his mentor, Albert King. The last few years haven't been easy on him; his wife shot him in the cheek, and he recently lost part of a leg to diabetes, but his new disk, "Lettin' Go," shows he's at the top of his form.

GALAPAGOS
70 North 6th St., Williamsburg (718-782-5188)—Sept. 14: **TheEbenLevyDisasterReliefFund** is the new project put together by the former Chucklehead mastermind Levy. For those who missed the homegrown funk scene of the nineties, Chucklehead was a hard-touring, much loved Boston band known for its incessant mixing of a heavy bass groove, hip-hop lyrics, and rock and roll. The new band adds a few more electronic flourishes to the mix, but the beat remains intact.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Sept. 13: The **Dickey Betts Band.** The longtime Allman Brothers guitarist and singer (you know him as the voice of "Rambling Man"; he wrote that song, too) has long been the band's not-so-secret weapon, the tenor foil to Gregg Allman's hound-dog growl and the meat-and-potatoes anchor to the late Duane Allman's slide-guitar histrionics. Here's a chance to see exactly what he brings to the Allmans' unique sound. Sept. 17: **Ted Nugent.** The aging if unrepentant carnivore, bow hunter, and sometime radio commentator returns to infect the crowd with a fresh strain of "Cat Scratch Fever." Sept. 19: **Wilco,** the charismatic roots-rock outfit led by Jeff Tweedy, is one of the more exceptional bands on the popular-music scene today. Tweedy and company have worked with Billy Bragg on the down-home, Woody Guthrie-inspired "Mermaid Avenue" compilations, all the while continuing to fine-tune their own sound. Last year's "Summer Teeth" album introduced a pop element that only enhanced their charm. ♦ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 696-9737.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Sept. 14: **David Yazbek** assembles his band to perform the rude, inventive, rocking stuff from his pop catalogue as well as a tune or two from his score for the soon-to-open Broadway musical "The Full Monty." This may be the last chance to catch this composer/singer/pianist while he still possesses even a shred of humility. Sept. 15: The guitarists **Arto Lindsay** and **Vinicius Cantuaria** offer an evening of Brazilian-by-way-of-downtown-New York



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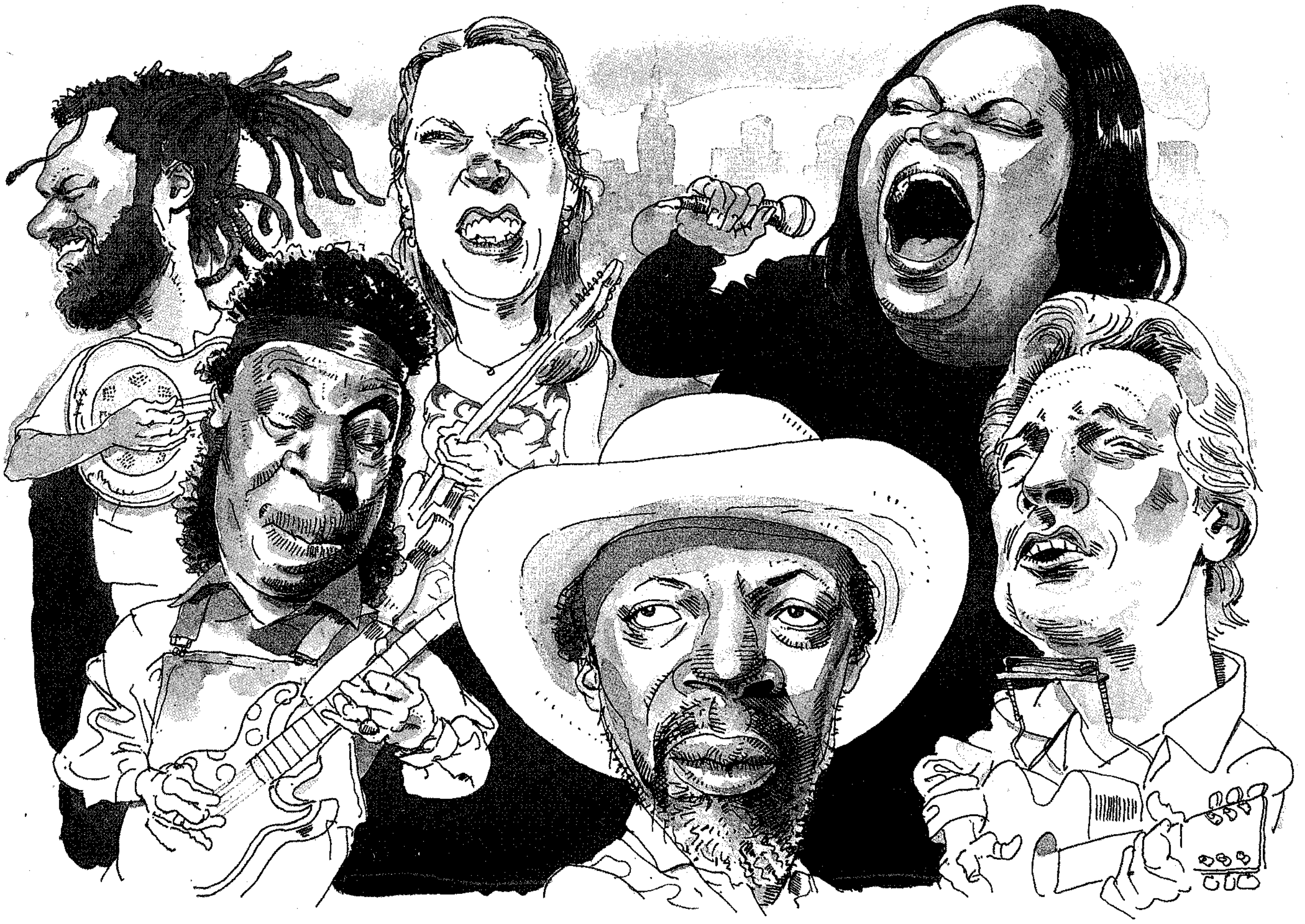


BLUES STREAK *The end of the summer is nothing to feel blue about—this week a clutch of blues musicians, young and old, are performing at various venues. Pictured, from left to right, are Corey Harris, Buddy Guy, and Susan Tedeschi (appearing at the B. B. King Blues Festival 2000); Son Seals (at Chicago B.L.U.E.S.); and Shemekia Copeland and John Hammond (each performing at the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill).*

JOE CIARDIELLO

music. Sept. 16: **Betty,** a three-woman operation whose act is full of funk and rock music, performance art, satire, and standup comedy.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Sept. 18: Paris's **Tahiti 80** makes timeless and lovely pop, as refreshing as a cool apéritif. Its full-length Stateside début album, "Puzzle" (on the clever little Chicago label Minty Fresh), was produced by Ivy guitarist Andy Chase and features contributions from Fountains of Wayne keyboardist Adam Schlesinger. Sept. 19: The edgy urban folktales of **Richard Buckner.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—The vocalist **Maureen McGovern** is currently at work in the woody nook known as the Oak Room. Dining.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Sept. 14-16: Look, Ma, four hands! **Stanley Jordan's** ability to wrest symphonic landscapes from his guitar continues to astound. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Sept. 17: A jazz septuagenarian playing at the very peak of his creative life, the alto saxophonist **Lee Konitz** is an adherent of pure improvisation—clichés, well-worn licks, and stock phrases are just not options for him. Grinding against the abstract piano figures of **Paul Bley** and the whirring electric-bass counterpoint of **Steve Swallow,** Konitz will be right in his delightfully flinty element. The second half of this double bill features **Kenny Burrell,** the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of jazz guitar. Burrell has both rhapsodized with white-gloved elegance and dug deep in the blues since he came down from Detroit in the mid-fifties.

FIREBIRD CAFÉ
365 W. 46th St. (586-0244)—Through Sept. 23: Fifty-four years is a long time to know another person, let alone sing with him or her on a regular basis, but the team of **Jackie & Roy** have been doing just that since 1946. The timeless weave of Jackie Cain's vocals and Roy Kral's jazzy piano and singing remains as vivacious as ever.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Sept. 17: The bassist **Charlie Haden** only finds the choicest notes to play, a gift that draws out the pianist **Gerri Allen's** most lyrical and discerning improvising. Both stylists are split personalities who feel as comfortable roaming in free-jazz territory as they do embracing standards—they make an exceptional fit. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through Sept. 17: The **Kurt Rosenwinkle** quartet. Rosenwinkle has found a jazz soul mate in the exceptional tenor saxophonist **Mark Turner,** in an association that benefits both; the guitarist's fusion tendencies are leavened, and Turner's analytical playing takes on an edgier cast. Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—A former saxophone-and-winds player and professional jazz provocateur for the Art Ensemble of Chicago, **Joseph Jarman** (celebrating his sixty-third birthday here on Sept. 13) now makes music with a pronounced introspective bent; quieter, yes, but still plenty effective. Sept. 15-17: Keep your eye on saxophonist and composer **Henry Threadgill;** he lives to surprise you. Whether stocking his bands with multiple tubas or pitting electric guitars against Indian harmoniums, this avant-gardist's avant-gardist only traffics in the unexpected. Sept. 17: **Andy Laster's Hydra Quartet** continues scoring with the ball that Ornette Coleman dropped when he abandoned his inventive, loose-limbed acoustic groups.

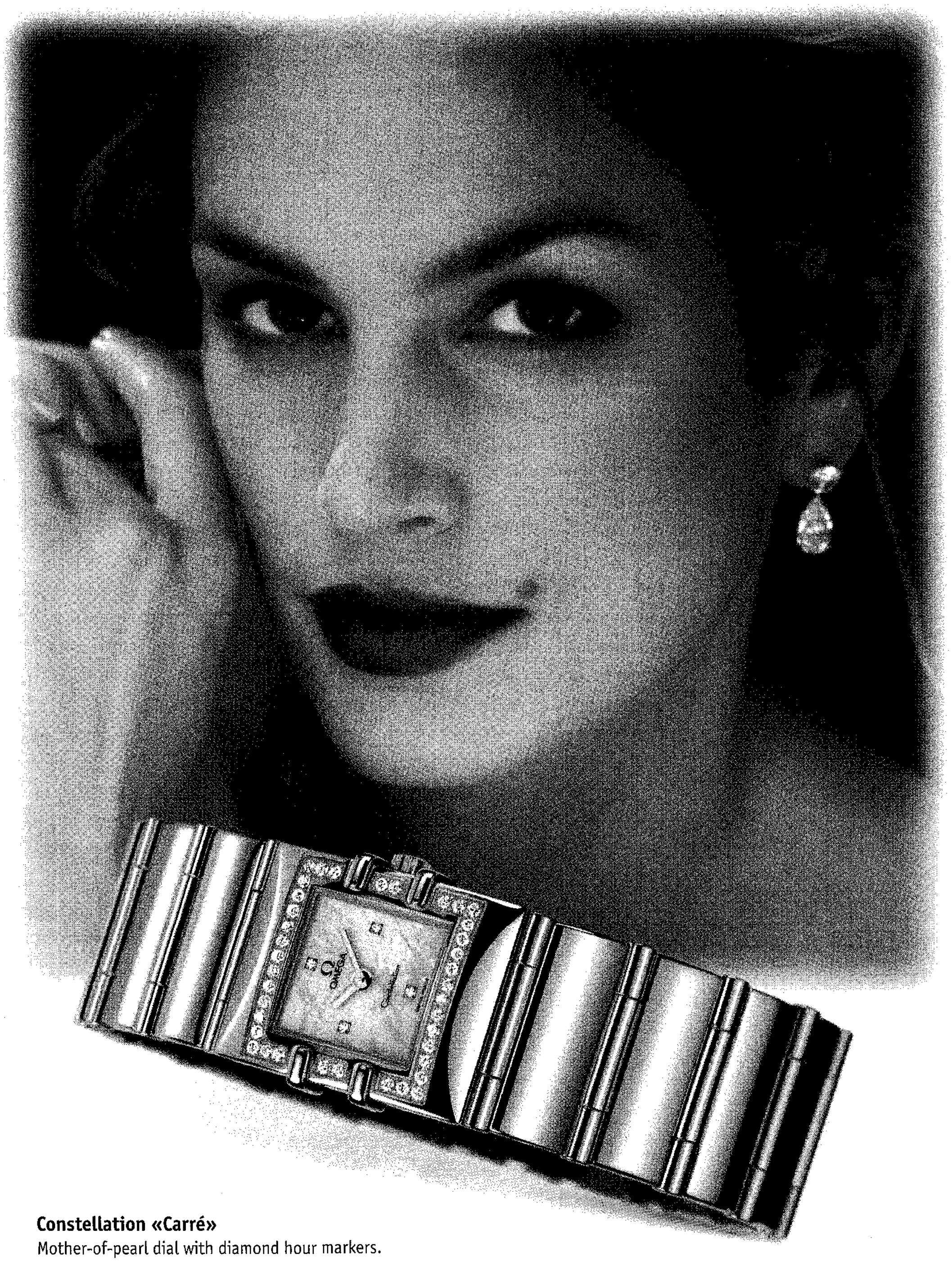
VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Sept. 17: The **Tommy Flanagan** trio. The world's finest jazz pianist settles in with his new trio, featuring bassist **Peter Washington** and the brilliant drummer **Albert Heath.** The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—Art history is full of brother acts, from today's Chapmans to the Soyers, Peales, and Le Nains of earlier eras. The most influential, however, were the Carracci of Bologna. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, Annibale and Agostino, together with their slightly older cousin Ludovico, helped finish off Mannerism, founded the first Academy, and ushered in a new style. But **"The Birth of Baroque: The Carracci at the Metropolitan"** isn't a grand familial survey. Instead it's a two-room teaser, consisting mostly of prints and drawings from the museum's

Cindy
Crawford's Choice



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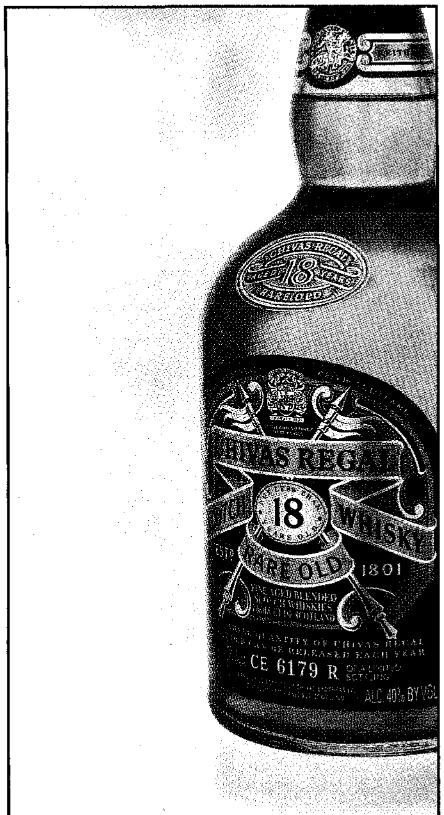

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ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Dressed by Success

The city's prosperity has brought a swagger to the fall season, filling the shops of Manhattan with crocodile greatcoats, sable tippets, ostrich gladstones, and other items that represent either the gleeful subversion of good taste or the baleful consequences of too much loose money. What used to be confined to Fifth and Madison Avenues has spread, and is now right at home downtown.

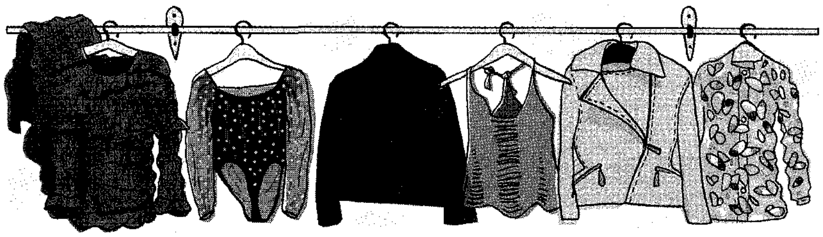
The staid house of **LOUIS VUITTON** (116 Greene St.; 274-9090) has settled below Houston Street with surprising ease, bringing with it not just those familiar brown bags but a collection of clothes by the Brooklyn-born Marc Jacobs, whose homage to nineteen-seventies Paris is infused with a borough boy's Continental longings. A wool-jersey trouser suit ($2,095) calls to mind Catherine Deneuve while sporting a profusion of toothy silver zippers whose oblong pulls are adorned with the LV logo. (When you're shelling out four figures, you deserve to see those famous initials somewhere.) Two of autumn's major trends—the penchant for pricey skins and the reëmergence of the skirt suit—inform an ensemble that appears to be made of red python, though in fact no reptiles were harmed in its execution. Instead, the outfit is fashioned from a clever mix of acrylic and acetate (jacket, $1,040; skirt, $650).

Though most of SoHo's artists and their dealers have departed for Chelsea, creative experiments still surface in their old haunts: at **ONWARD SOHO** (172 Mercer St.; 343-3912), in the building that used to house Holly Solomon's gallery, deeply imaginative creations by the Japanese designer Yoshiki Hishinuma clearly owe a debt to such master pleaters as Issey Miyake and Mario Fortuny. A crinkly red dress that seems to be glistening with wet paint is not only dry but disarmingly soft to the touch ($740). And an irrepressible magnolia-pink outfit, decorated with fluttery appliqués, will appeal to the sophisticated adult who has not forgotten the joy of dressing like a flower in the class play (jacket, $575; skirt, $470).

With its Crayola-inspired interior, **KIRNA ZABETE** (96 Greene St.; 941-9656) looks more like a chic day-care center than a clothing store, and the pair of young women who run the place specialize in playful examples of the season's offerings. A woolly fringe imparts an unexpectedly equine air to an aqua wool coat by Rubin Chappelle ($766); less demure is a sultry sleeveless boiled-wool sweater sliced with peekaboo cobwebs ($215) by Liz Collins, who makes clothes with the help of an old-fashioned knitting machine. A sheer polka-dot off-the-shoulder peasant blouse from Jean Paul Gaultier turns out to be a bodysuit that resolves rather abruptly into a thong ($525).

At **MIU MIU** (100 Prince St.; 431-4303), suggestions for the winter months include a fragile white cotton dress with puffed sleeves and a sweetheart neckline, which looks like a maid's uniform, except for the childlike stitching around the sleeves ($440); a skimpy bias-cut dance frock in scarlet and black ($470); and a pair of "Footlight Parade"-ready crêpe-de-chine tap pants ($200). Ruffled sheepskin turns up in the form of a lavender overcoat ($1,730). And heliotrope suede platform sling-backs ($330), intended for a sub-deb's feet, have open toes; high, thick heels; floppy bows; and plenty of history—not only could they have figured in Minnie's seduction of Mickey, they might well have helped Jerry Hall captivate Mick.

—*Lynn Yaeger*



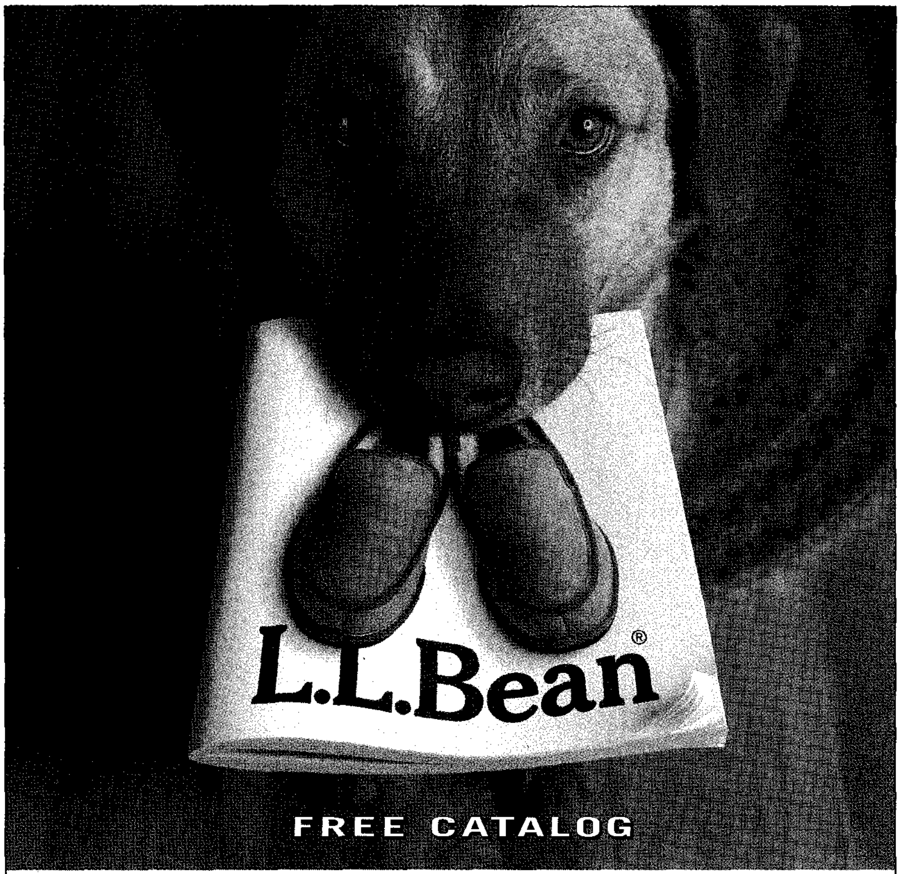
collections. A few of these are marvellous. Annibale's figure studies are lithe, Michelangelesque wonders. His small etching of Christ being tortured by leering soldiers, meanwhile, rivals the harsh realism of his friend Caravaggio. When it comes to oil paintings, however, the exhibition is a disappointment—with the sole exception of Ludovico's great, morbid "Lamentation," which is surely the most haunting and mortuary depiction of the divine cadaver ever. Through Sept. 17. ♦ **"John Singer Sargent: Beyond the Portrait Studio."** Paintings, drawings, and watercolors from the collection. Through Sept. 24. ♦ On the roof garden, a septet of late stainless-steel sculptures, by David Smith (1906-65). The earliest, "Sentinel V," from 1959, suggests a slim, side-stepping human figure, like a scrap-metal version of Fred Astaire. The others, dating from the last three years of Smith's life, are more resolutely abstract. All were constructed from a prefabricated vocabulary of steel beams and boxes Smith would first arrange on the floor of his studio. The procedure shows: most feel two-sided, not quite fully sculptural. But they're still full of precarious pleasures, enhanced by the gleaming, graffiti-like designs that Smith burnished into their surfaces. And the rooftop situation suits them perfectly, especially the "Cubi XXVII," which frames a view of Central Park South. Through late fall. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Since late April, members of MOMA's professional and administrative staff have been on strike. But if you're loath to cross a picket line, you're in luck: Projects 70 presents banners, by a trio of artists (Jim Hodges, Beatrice Milhazes, and Faith Ringgold), which festoon the outside of the museum's façade. Milhazes's contribution is pure ornament, a swirl of tropical pink, green, and gold. Ringgold combines personal references and imagery by Matisse in a memorial to lost loved ones. Hodges's banner is by far the most winning. A pair of connect-the-dot constellations (corresponding to Libra and Scorpio, the astrological signs of the artist and his partner) grace a cloth the inky color of the night sky (the reverse side is Liberace gold). Each star is a cutout hole, strung with small bells, though the delicate chimes are often drowned out by the sound of zealous strikers squeezing plastic rats. Through Oct. 31. ♦ **"Making Choices."** The twenty-four-part show concentrates on works made between 1920 and 1960, drawn exclusively from the museum's extensive holdings, in a series of tightly focussed exhibitions, several devoted to a single artist (Man Ray, Cartier-Bresson, Morandi). Closing, in stages, on Sept. 19 and Sept. 26. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—The latest collaboration between the impishness of Frank Gehry and the grandiosity of Thomas Krens is on view in the form of a proposal for a new Guggenheim museum in Manhattan. To be built on a small island of its own, just below the South Street Seaport, the project is essentially Bilbao 2: far bigger, more crumpled and rococo, the museum's wriggling volumes float above a vast shadowed plaza with restaurants and an ice-skating rink. A single office tower rises at a Pisa-like angle from its center. The effect, we're told, would resemble a cloud-ringed skyscraper, but other things—a titanium tutu, an earthquake in a vent-assembly shop, an homage to late Frank Stella—come to mind as well. Gehry's large-scale models offer the most intriguing architectural conundrum of the year. Through Oct. 14. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—**"The Art of Alice Neel,"** the museum's second retrospective devoted to the artist, and the first since her death, in 1984, offers seventy-five paintings and watercolors, including likenesses of artists (Andy Warhol, Robert Smithson), writers (Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Fearing), and family members. Through Sept. 17. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 9.)

EDEL RODRIGUEZ



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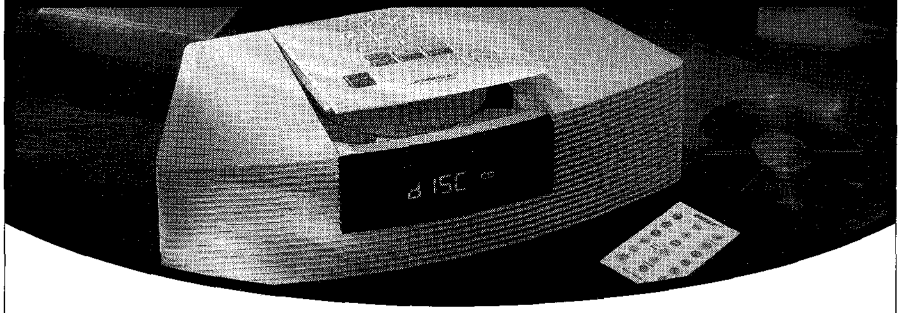

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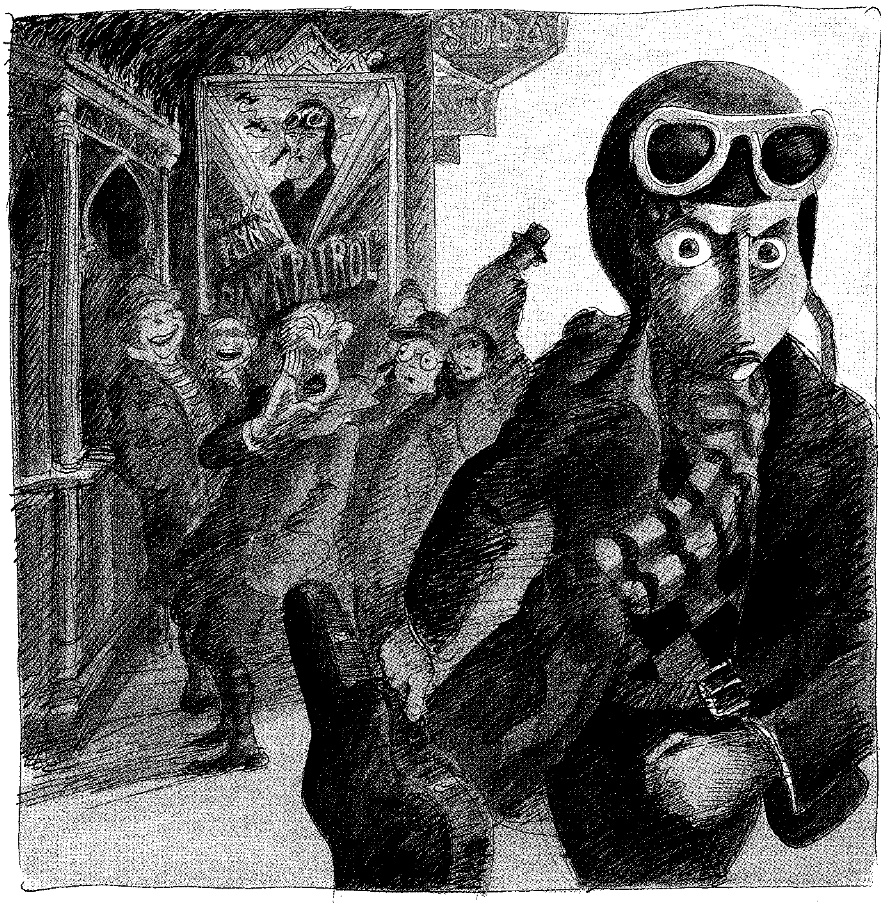

Watercolors from Edward Sorel's new book, "The Saturday Kid," at Davis & Langdale.

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

AMADEO DE SOUZA CARDOSO
An exhilarating retrospective of a little-known Portuguese artist who worked on and off in Paris from 1906 until his death from influenza, in 1918, at the age of thirty. The show reveals a pioneering modernist painter who was also a gifted draftsman—witness the jaunty, Futurist-inspired "Movement, circa 1912," a streetscape with automobiles, cycles, and a horse-drawn carriage. Souza Cardoso created one of the century's earliest abstract paintings (a 1913 work, included here), but it's his flirtation with Cubism which earns his place in art history. A hidden treasure. Through Sept. 16. (AXA Gallery, 787 Seventh Ave., at 52nd St. 554-4731.)

Season Openers

WILL BARNET
Drawings, including mid-century abstractions and later figurative studies. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050.)

ALAN BRAY
Landscapes of Maine, from an aerial perspective. (Schmidt-Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. 888-1122.)

IAN DAWSON
Large-scale sculptures made from everyday objects exposed to intense heat. (James Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171.)

MARY FRANK
Dreamy (in the Jungian sense) and atmospheric oil paintings. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111.)

DANIEL GARCÍA
Paintings of objects that, in isolation, carry a symbolic weight. (Galeria Ramis Barquet, 41 E. 57th St. 644-9090.)

GREGORY GILLESPIE
A memorial exhibition devoted to the figurative painter. (Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 355-4545.)

ANDREW MASULLO
Colorful paintings with an energetic, mosaic-like structure. Opens Sept. 14. (Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 397-6780.)

NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE
Silk screens from 1969-70 by the "flower-power feminist." (Rickards, 1045 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 924-0858.)

DAVID SMITH
Nudes the sculptor made in his final winter. Opens Sept. 14. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave. 744-2313.)

EDWARD SOREL
Watercolor drawings by the *New Yorker* artist, from his new book, "The Saturday Kid," about a boy who loves the movies. (Davis & Langdale, 231 E. 60th St. 838-0333.)

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

"FABULAE FABULORUM"
What do images of hirsute male nipples and interracial cunnilingus have to do with fairy tales, the alleged subject of this group show? It's hard to determine. Still, curator Ombretta Agró has put together a pleasantly haphazard assortment of work by Italian, German, Dutch, and Korean artists. Most memorable is Rob van Erve's suspended Plexiglas sculpture, festooned with hanging weights as though it were in danger of floating away. Through Oct. 7. (Trans Hudson, 416 W. 13th St. 242-3232.)

Season Openers

ROB DE MAR
Sculptures of biospheres and mini-universes made from steel, plywood, fungi, stones, model trees. (Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937.)

LOUISE FISHMAN
New abstract paintings, made with multiple layers, sanded, scraped, and painted over. Opens Sept. 15. (Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727.)

UDOMSAK KRISANAMIS
Three-dimensional abstract collages, made from newspaper clippings, invitations to art openings, and noodles, among other objects. (Gavin Brown's Enterprise, 436 W. 15th St. 627-5258.)

KARL MANN
Large-scale assemblages made from flea-market cast-offs. Opens Sept. 14. (Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819.)

ALICE NEEL
Twenty-five paintings from the portraitist's final years. (Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 366-4774.)

JOHN SALVEST
The gallery's inaugural show features sculptures made from objects that might be found at home (aspirin, pencils, straight pins, chewing gum) in obsessive arrangements. Opens Sept. 14. (Poissant Projects, 140 W. 30th St. 279-8969.)

CHARLES SPURRIER
Bright assemblages made up of Mylar, pieces of broken mirror, air fresheners, colored Christmas bulbs, etc. (Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.)

CLAUDE WAMPLER
An installation and continuous live performance. (Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 727-3323.)

LESLIE WAYNE
Wooden boxes filled with paint, then gouged, poked, and gutted to reveal the strata of color. (Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 645-1701.)

MEG WEBSTER
A large, undulating floor sculpture and an installation. (Paula Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

RACHEL WHITEREAD
Drawings created in 1994-95, in preparation for the artist's Water Tower Project. Opens Sept. 15. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100.)

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

VANESSA BEECROFT
Last spring, Beecroft marshalled a group of Navy Seals to march onto the deck of the U.S.S. Intrepid and stand spotlit at attention for ninety minutes while she documented the proceedings. Her current show displays photographs and videos of the performance she called "The Silent Service." Deitch Projects' newly renovated, high-ceilinged second space on Wooster, entirely open to the street and light on one end, makes a perfect showcase for Beecroft's large-format, high-gloss portraits of the men; they hang high enough on the walls that you have to look up at them and strain for eye contact. Through Sept. 16. (Deitch Projects, 18 Wooster St. 343-7300.)

Season Openers

NICOLA COSTANTINO
Sculptures by the Argentine artist, who uses animal skin (including human) in her works. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.)

MARCEL DZAMA / JOCKUM NORDSTRÖM
Drawings. (Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.)

CHRISTINE HILL
"Pilot," an installation (functional studio, working offices, sound-stage set) for the staging of an invented TV pilot. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232.)

MANUEL NERI
Human figures sculpted in bronze and marble, and nudes, painted and drawn. (Cowles, 74 Grand St. 925-3500.)

PIA STADTBÄUMER
Sculptures of children at play which evoke adult anxieties. Opens Sept. 15. (Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. 343-2405.)

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DO-HO SUH
An installation that includes wallpaper made of ID cards and a glass floor held up by thousands of plastic figures. (Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753.)

CORBAN WALKER
A site-specific installation made of glass. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
Sept. 14: A daylong auction of fine and rare wines. ♦ Sept. 19: Three sessions of Japanese and Korean art works. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

CHRISTIE'S EAST
Sept. 13: Nineteenth-century paintings. ♦ Sept. 14: Antique and fine jewelry. ♦ Sept. 18: Asian decorative arts. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

SOTHEBY'S
A sale of collectible wines—mostly Bordeaux, as usual, but with a fair share of other intriguing offerings, including a good selection from cult wineries in California. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000. Sept. 16.)

DOYLE
Sept. 13: Furniture, paintings, and decorative pieces. ♦ Sept. 18: A sale of Asian art works, particularly strong in eighteenth-century Chinese porcelain and paintings. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

SWANN
The house's fall season begins with a fascinating auction of New Yorkiana, including photographs, maps, drawings, posters, and ephemera relating to buildings, people, commercial establishments, or anything else that makes the city unique. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. Sept. 14.)

Joel Meyerowitz's 1975 "Camel Coat Couple in Street Steam," at Meyerowitz.

MORELL & CO.
A wine auction from a firm that typically provides excellent offerings for folks intent on drinking, rather than cellaring, their purchases. (Grand Havana Room, 666 Fifth Ave. Sept. 16. For information, call 307-4200.)

NEW YORK ARMORY ANTIQUES SHOW
A hundred dealers offering a bit of everything. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Sept. 13-17. For information, call 472-1180.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

PINO DAL GAL
"Chicken Story" documents an active slaughterhouse outside Verona, Italy, in twenty color pictures, circa 1976. Dal Gal's hazy, cinematic compositions make the birds and their butchers look like the stars of a dark comedy. Opening Sept. 14. (De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 327-1482.)

SHEILA METZNER
Metzner has moved beyond her signature pigment-printed images, but she continues to take inspiration and technique from photography's past. "New York City 2000," her current series of hand-coated platinum prints, would look more at home in an old issue of Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work* than in any contemporary equivalent. Her refusal to take the city's familiar architectural icons for granted has yielded sensitive and respectful images of the Chrysler and Empire State Buildings and the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges. Through Oct. 21. (Stevenson, 338 W. 23rd St. 352-0070.)

JOEL MEYEROWITZ
These vintage prints from the late sixties through the mid-seventies predate Meyerowitz's better-known landscape work and reveal him as a pioneer in color street photography. He was one of the first to expand Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment" to include open-ended, luminous scenes that have become popular with contemporary photographers such as Philip-Lorca diCorcia. Pictures like "Camel Coat Couple in Street Steam" have no single protagonist, but rather a set of characters in action, dependent on one another to form the composition and make the picture. Through Oct. 21. (Meyerowitz, 580 Broadway. 625-3434.)

ROBERT POLIDORI
This set of large color prints—some as big as fifty by seventy inches—spans a decade of architectural photography, and includes some recent assignments for this magazine. In the aftermath of the revolution in Lebanon, Polidori studies bullet-hole constellations on a wall; in France, he looks in on renovations at Versailles; and, in New York, he observes the colorful mess of a claustrophobic East Village apartment. His detailed, color-saturated interiors and exteriors are at once historic documents and aesthetic experiences, in the tradition of Eugène Atget and Joel Sternfeld. Through Oct. 14. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999.)

MELVIN SOKOLSKY
From 1959 to 1970, Melvin Sokolsky worked for *Harper's Bazaar*, where he was known for dressing up his fashion shoots with Surrealist stunts—models were made to fly in bubbles hovering over the streets of Paris, and references to Escher and Magritte abounded. Even when he stopped staging spectacles, his supersaturated colors and deadpan compositions accentuated the far-out: in his simplest shots, women are frozen in tortured poses, their glassy-eyed cool defining the sixties even more than their hairdos. Through Sept. 30. (Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223.)

BERT TEUNISSEN
Vermeer might have appreciated these finely detailed pictures of elderly Dutch men and women at home. Though Teunissen takes advantage of diffuse, gold-toned natural light in each wide shot, he never shows a window, perhaps in deference to the cloistered lives he documents. Through Oct. 4. (Gallery 24, at 552 W. 24th St. 414-0370.)

FRANK YAMRUS
This series of black-and-white shots reveals little of the body—just head and shoulders—but discerning viewers will guess immediately what's happening beyond the frame. Yamrus asked his subjects, both male and female, to masturbate for the camera, and he chose these pictures of "Rapture" from the moments just before, during, and after climax. If nothing else, they offer a revealing study of the ability to pose even (or especially) when orgasm is close at hand. Through Oct. 14. (Morthland, 225 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 242-7767.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. (860-1777)—**"A Durable Memento"** presents daguerreotypes of places (Connecticut, Liberia) and people (John Brown) taken by Augustus Washington, the son of a former slave. Through Sept. 24. **"Positions in the Life World"** surveys Martha Rossler's photos and videos, including such classics as her 1975 "Semiotics of the Kitchen." Through Oct. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

WILHELM VON GLOEDEN
Wessel and O'Connor, 242 W. 26th St. 242-8811. Open Sundays. Through Oct 8.

"CAPTURE THE MOMENT"
Newseum, 580 Madison Ave. 317-7503. Through Sept. 23.

"OTRAS COSAS"
Mexican Cultural Institute, 27 E. 39th St. 217-6422. Through Oct. 10.

See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
Sept. 15 at 8 and Sept. 17 at 1:30: "Madama Butterfly." ♦ Sept. 16 at 1:30: Donizetti's "Roberto Devereux," with soprano Lauren Flanigan in the role of Queen Elizabeth and a cast that also includes mezzo-soprano Jane Dutton, tenor Fernando de la Mora, and baritone Mark Delavan; conducted by George Manahan. ♦ Sept. 16 at 8 and Sept. 19 at 7:30: "Le Nozze di Figaro," with Sari Gruber (as Susanna), Pamela Armstrong (Countess Almaviva), Paula Rasmussen (Cherubino), Dean Ely (Figaro), and John Hancock (Count Almaviva); Steuart Bedford. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

AMATO OPERA COMPANY
For more than half a century, this hardworking troupe in a vest-pocket theatre has survived, against considerable odds, thanks to the devotion of Anthony and Sally Amato, who met onstage in 1943, married two years later, and committed themselves to personally overseeing every aspect of the company's operations. Mrs. Amato died on August 18, bringing to an end a career that regularly included such thankless but essential tasks as manning the box office, sewing the costumes, and operating the lights. But since the Amatos were creatures of the theatre, there is no question that the show will go on. The company's fifty-third season will open with a production of "Lucia di Lammermoor" which—to use one of the Amatos' favorite phrases—promises to be "small, but oh so grand." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Sept. 16 at 7:30 and Sept. 17 at 2:30.)

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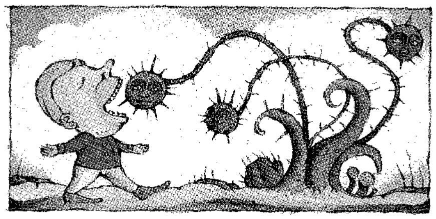
BOOK CURRENTS

Where the Wild Things Are Eaten

"Nothing tastes even remotely like the evergreens, and once the taste is acquired, nothing else will do." So writes the Canadian naturalist Robert K. Henderson in his just-published **THE NEIGHBORHOOD FORAGER** (Chelsea Green), an amusing introduction to identifying, harvesting, and preparing wild foods. Henderson points out that evergreen infusions saved the explorer Cartier's men from scurvy back in 1536, and that the modern fascination with edible plants got its start when Euell Gibbons published "Stalking the Wild Asparagus," in 1962. While forests have their share of foodstuffs, Henderson argues that foraging is best in suburbia, where subdivision menaces like crab apples and dandelions make delicious eating and cars can be used to crack open black walnuts.



SERGIO RUZZIER

In **GOING TO SEED** (Ancient City Press), the outdoorswoman Kahanah Farnsworth zeroes in on the bounty of the American Southwest, an area surprisingly rich in kitchen-ready plants, from agaves to piñons, sunflowers, and tomatillos. Farnsworth offers adventuresome recipes as well as advice on how to avoid lethal encounters with death-cap mushrooms and rattlesnake locoweed. Provence native Anne Gardon presents a homier feast in **THE WILD FOOD GOURMET** (Firefly); her recipes include milkweed gratin and cattail-pollen soufflé, and she also extols the virtues of oxeye daisies and hedgehog mushrooms.

Hedgehogs—the mammal, not the fungus—are the sort of creature you might find in Johnny Kolakowski's **COOKIN' WILD WITH JOHNNY** (Metro Media). Kolakowski is the owner and chef of a wild-game restaurant in Detroit, where he earned the nickname "the Muskrat King." The fact that exotic game is now readily available in bistros further proves Henderson's point that "the safari begins on the front step."

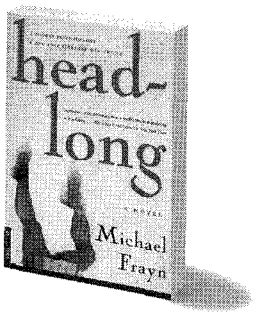
—Mark Rozzo

Books.
[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

Edge-of-Your-Seat Reading

HEADLONG

by Michael Frayn

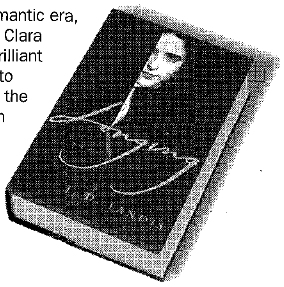


In this satiric tale revolving around a missing Bruegel painting, an unexpected dinner invitation leads philosopher Martin Clay to discover one of the world's lost treasures gathering soot from his host's grimy fireplace. (Picador)

Pub. Price: $14.00
Discount **20%**
Our Price: $11.20

LONGING

by J. D. Landis

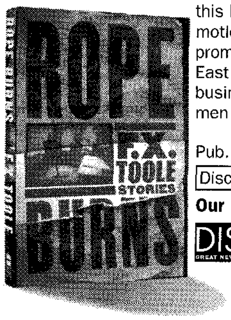


In this haunting, sensuous novel of the Romantic era, the passionate, artistic lives of Robert and Clara Schumann are explored in full, from their brilliant music to their rapturous love and devotion to each other. What's more, this tale portrays the relationships between men and women with infinite care, sympathy and wisdom. (Harcourt Brace)

Pub. Price: $26.00
Discount **20%**
Our Price: $20.80

ROPE BURNS: STORIES FROM THE CORNER

by F. X. Toole



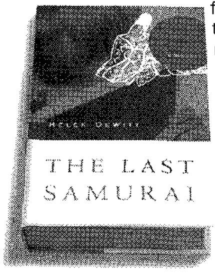
Offering a raw glimpse into the fast-paced, vicious world of boxing, this biting collection of tales centers on a motley group of athletes, trainers, corrupt promoters, and other assorted dwellers of East L.A.: all pawns and players in a dirty business that can destroy dreams and rob men of their souls. (Ecco Press)

Pub. Price: $23.00
Discount **20%**
Our Price: $18.40

DISCOVER
GREAT NEW WRITERS AT BARNES & NOBLE

THE LAST SAMURAI

by Helen DeWitt

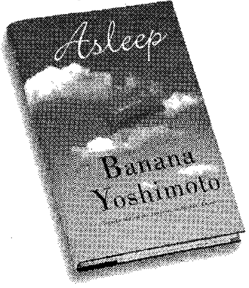


Ludo, a gifted six year-old prodigy, embarks on a heartfelt search to find his birth father or a man heroic enough to be his father. Seven men of his choosing must test their character and fortitude for this privilege, while the deeply tender bond between Ludo and his mother grows even stronger. (Talk Miramax)

Pub. Price: $24.95
Discount **20%**
Our Price: $19.96

ASLEEP

by Banana Yoshimoto

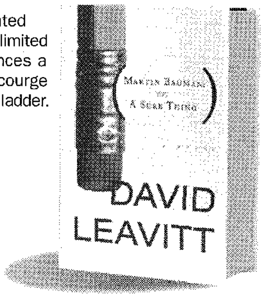


This luminous collection of three ethereal novellas focuses on the themes of love, death and sleep, with each of the female protagonists battling some form of sleep disorder and spiritual malaise due to trauma. (Grove Press)

Pub. Price: $21.00
Discount **20%**
Our Price: $16.80

MARTIN BAUMAN; OR, A SURE THING

by David Leavitt



Martin Bauman, a brilliant, young and talented fledgling writer, winds his way through the unlimited chaos of New York as he falls in love, balances a hectic social life, deals with the emerging scourge of AIDS, and works his way up the publishing ladder. (Houghton Mifflin)

Pub. Price: $26.00
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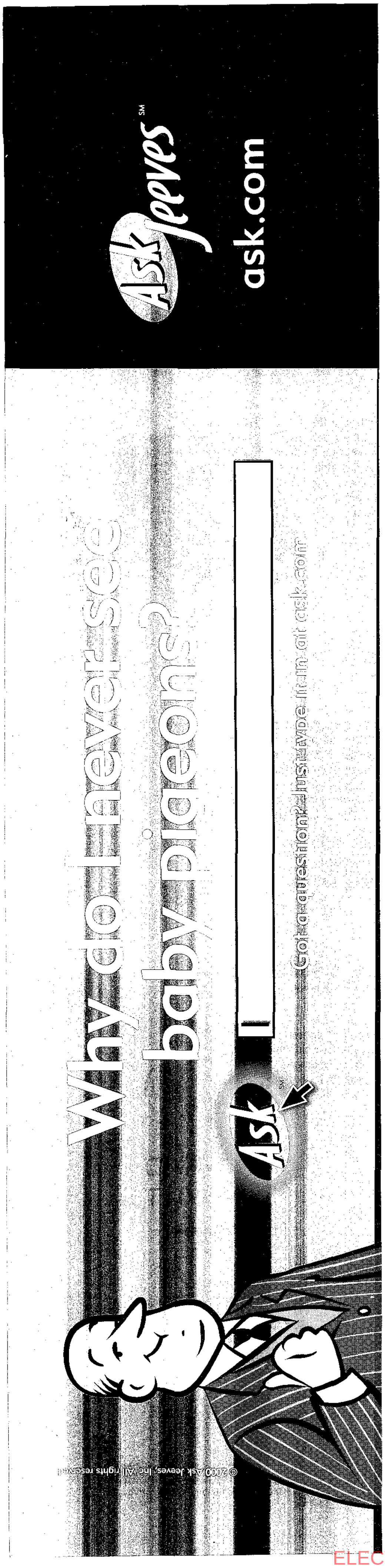

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ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUS

MANHATTAN CHAMBER SINFONIA
Less than two weeks into the new semester at the Manhattan School of Music, this student chamber orchestra puts itself on the line with a challenging program comprising James MacMillan's "The Confession of Isobel Gowdie," Oscar Böhme's F-Minor Trumpet Concerto (featuring Robert Sullivan, the associate principal trumpeter of the New York Philharmonic), a *sonata a cinque* by the Bolognese Baroque composer Giuseppe Torelli, and Mendelssohn's "Scotch" Symphony. The concert is conducted by Stewart Robertson, whose Scottish roots may be expected to serve him especially well in the pieces by MacMillan (his compatriot) and Mendelssohn (whose symphony was inspired by a visit he made to Scotland). (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. Sept. 15 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY
Jens Nygaard leads two obscure works, a famous masterpiece, and a piece that falls in between: a suite by the Elizabethan composer Giles Farnaby and Debussy's "Marche Écossaise sur un Thème Populaire" (also known as the "Earl of Ross" March, and unquestionably obscure), Mozart's Symphony No. 40 (famous), and Scriabin's Piano Concerto (known to connoisseurs, but not many others, and here featuring Ilya Itin). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. Sept. 18 at 2 and 7 and Sept. 19 at 8. For information about tickets, call 799-1259.)

PROMETHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Wilson Hermanto conducts this assemblage of current and former Juilliard students in Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll," Beethoven's Symphony No. 2, and Mendelssohn's "Italian" Symphony. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Sept. 19 at 2.)

RECITALS

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
The organization's season doesn't begin in earnest until mid-October, but the official opening takes place this week, when Joseph Silverstein, Cho-Liang Lin, Ani Kavafian, and Ida Kavafian take turns in the spotlight for an evening of solo and duo concertos for violin, by Bach and Vivaldi, including the latter's "Four Seasons." (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Sept. 13 at 8.)

KALICHSTEIN-LAREDO-ROBINSON TRIO
The ensemble offers two classic piano trios—Mozart's in B-Flat Major and Brahms's in B Major—plus Richard Danielpour's recently composed "A Child's Reliquary," also for piano trio. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Sept. 13 at 8.)

CONCERTANTE CHAMBER PLAYERS
Members of the string ensemble offer Mozart's String Quintet in B-Flat Major (K. 174), Jan Radzynski's Serenade for Strings (a première), and Strauss's "Metamorphosen" (in a version for seven instruments, scaled down from the original twenty-three). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Sept. 13 at 8.)

GWENDOLYN TOTH AND DONGSOK SHIN
The wife-and-husband keyboard players team up for four-hand sonatas by Mozart, performed on a replica of the fortepiano the composer once owned. (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. Sept. 14 at 1:15. No tickets necessary.)

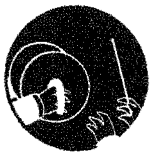
BARGEMUSIC
Sept. 14 and Sept. 16 at 7:30: Cellist Ronald Thomas and pianist Gilbert Kalish perform Beethoven's A-Major Cello Sonata, and violinist Carmit Zori completes the ensemble for piano trios by Mozart (in B-Flat Major) and Mendelssohn (in C Minor). ♦ Sept. 15 at 7:30 and Sept. 17 at 4: Seven musicians gather to perform Jolivet's "Rhapsodie à Sept" and Stravinsky's chamber divertissement "L'Histoire du Soldat," with the violist Toby Appel setting aside his instrument for the week in order to appear as the narrator. ♦ Sept. 16 at 2:30: A family performance of "L'Histoire du Soldat." (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

LUCIANO PAVAROTTI
The tenor fills Madison Square Garden—leaving just enough space for soprano Annalisa Raspagliosi (who will assist in some duets) and the Opera Orchestra of New York, which will be conducted by Leone Magiera. (Sept. 14 at 8. For information about tickets, call 307-7171.)

WILD GINGER CHAMBER PLAYERS
A group of core players from the Wild Ginger Philharmonic perform Mendelssohn's Octet and Mozart's Serenade in C Minor (K. 388/384a). (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. Sept. 15 at 8. ♦ Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. Sept. 16 at 8. For information about either concert, call 888-444-0353.)

LORI SIMS
The gold-medal winner of the 1998 Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition performs Schumann's "Kreisleriana" and Toccata (Op. 7), Beethoven's "Eroica" Variations, and

CLASSICAL NOTES



Independent record companies have long been a refuge for excellent artists with offbeat repertoire. Gloria Cheng's **Piano Dance** (Telarc) might easily have been just another glib concept album—twenty-three pieces explicitly based on dances—had she not gone to the effort of assembling a compelling recital of twentieth-century pieces and then playing them as if her life depended on it. Most are short (only half the tracks last more than three minutes), resulting in an ever-changing landscape of classics and contemporary items which culminates in a delightful double whammy: Donald R. Davis's "Illicit Felicity," a hilarious mambo written for the lesbian cult movie "Bound"; and "Conga," a nearly ten-minute danse macabre by the dependably brilliant Uruguayan-American composer Miguel del Aguila.

There's a similar passionate dedication in Anthony de Mare's **Wizards & Wildmen** (CRI), an exploration of largely unknown music by Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, and Lou Harrison. It's an audacious disk, from the pianist's beefcake cover photo to the choice of composers. These pillars of modernism redefined what piano music could be, and de Mare, playing at the keyboard, strumming the strings, and even singing along, plumbs the lustrous beauty lurking in the challenging scores. In his hands, Cowell's 1925 classic "The Banshee," often cited but rarely played, sounds like the unholy offspring of the Blair Witch and a humpback whale.

Independent labels also sustain the careers of splendid artists who, for whatever reason, have not achieved fame or fortune. Consider Madeleine Forte, two of whose disks have recently appeared in Connoisseur Society's catalogue. This French-born pupil of two great masters, Alfred Cortot and Wilhelm Kempff, made a splash at international competitions in the sixties before opting for a career in academia as a Messiaen authority. At a time when national styles have all but dissolved into a generalized international goulash, Forte's gorgeous tone and sensuous line evoke classic French pianism. Her elegant **Frédéric Chopin**, which includes the B-Minor Sonata and all four scherzos, may not supplant memories of Cortot's own limpid Chopin playing, but her **Maurice Ravel** holds its own against interpretations by many of her more celebrated peers, from the chaste simplicity of the Sonatine to the virtuosic "Gaspard de la Nuit," in which no prisoners are taken and no notes are dropped.

—*James M. Keller*

works by Sofia Gubaidulina and Curtis Curtis-Smith. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Sept. 16 at 8.)

VECTOR FIVE: CHAMBER MUSIC
This contemporary composers' incentive opens its second season with a concert of pieces by Milton Babbitt, Kenji Bunch, Eric Ewazen, Stefania de Kenessey, and Yuri Bortz. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Sept. 16 at 8.)

FRANCISCO ROLDAN
The Colombian guitarist, a faculty member of the Mannes College of Music who has recently been performing with the flamenco dancer Pilar Rioja, plays music by Bach, Britten, Rodrigo, Manuel Ponce, Ernst Krenek, and Philip Houghton. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Sept. 16 at 8:30.)

"CLASSICAL CAFÉ"
In the first concert of a new series at Makor, a casual venue in the vicinity of Lincoln Center, violinist Colin Jacobsen, cellist Rubin Kodheli, and pianist Eric Huebner perform Mendelssohn's Piano Trio in D Minor. (35 W. 67th St. 601-1000. Sept. 17 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

A CUP FOR SIX BILLION
Soshitsu Sen XV is the grand master of the Urasenke tradition of Chado, or the Way of Tea, a four-hundred-year-old Japanese belief system built around harmony, respect, purity, and tranquillity (and yes, tea). Sen, a fifteenth-generation descendent of Sen Rikyu, who founded Chado in the sixteenth century, has travelled from his home in Kyoto to New York City for a special tea ceremony at the opening of the fifty-fifth session of the United Nations, which has been dubbed the "Millennium Assembly" and is, according to U.N. press material, "the largest single gathering of Heads of State and/or Government ever held in the world." On Sept. 13 at 1:30, Sen heads uptown to lead a ritual tea ceremony for world peace which is open to the rest of us. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. No tickets necessary.)

THE CRISIS AROUND THE CORNER
Doctors Without Borders, the international nonprofit relief organization founded in 1971 and known around the world by its original French name, Médecins sans Frontières, has organized a travelling exhibition called "A Refugee Camp in the Heart of the City." This seven-thousand-square-foot display, which comes to Central Park Sept. 15-16, before visiting the Liberty Science Center (in New Jersey), Prospect Park, and Van Cortland Park, is a hands-on illustration of the hardships confronting the estimated fourteen million refugees in the world today. The exhibition has tents made of the actual materials used in the field, and information detailing how clean water is provided and waste removed, how food is prepared, and how health-care needs are met. For more information, call 655-3793, or visit www.refugeecamp.org. ♦ In a related event, television journalist John Hockenberry talks with former M.S.F. president Dr. Rony Brauman about the history of his organization. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. Sept. 14 at 7:30.)

READINGS
Sept. 13 at 8: By the novelist Jonathan Ames, from his collection of New York *Press* columns, "What's Not to Love: The Adventures of a Mildly Perverted Young Writer"; by Akhil Sharma, from his novel, "An Obedient Father"; and by Rachel Resnick, from her novel, "Go West Young F*cked-Up Chick." (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Sept. 18 at 7:30: By Ben Sherwood, from his novel, "The Man Who Ate the 747." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary.)

MORE TALKS
Sept. 13 at 7: The New York *Times* writer Stephen Holden talks with the singer Eartha Kitt about life as a gay icon. (Lesbian & Gay Community Services Center, 1 Little West 12th St. 620-7310.) ♦ Sept. 14 at 7: Don Campbell discusses his book "The Mozart Effect." (The Graduate Center, City University of New York, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. Tickets at the door.)

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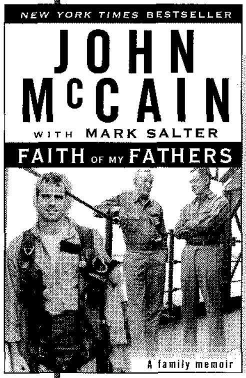

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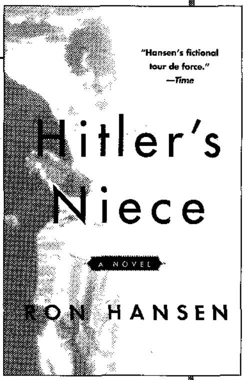

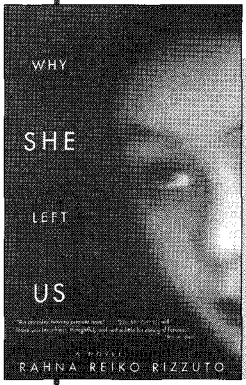

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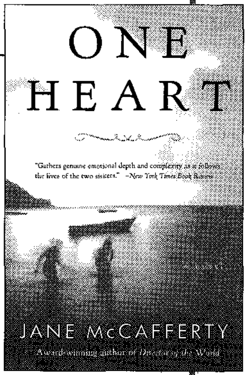
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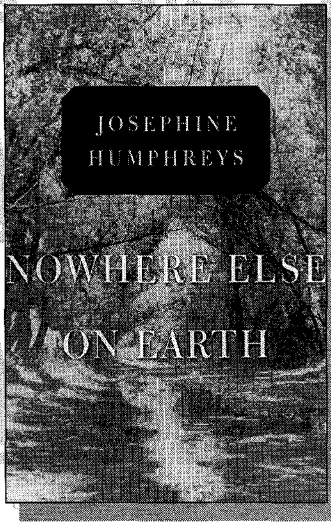

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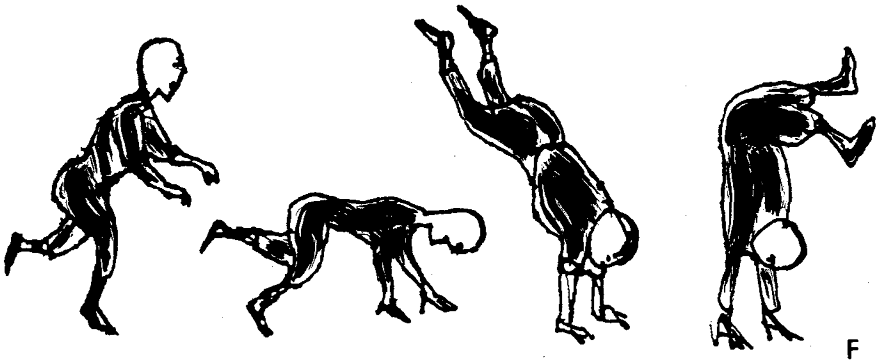

MOVIES OPENING

ALMOST FAMOUS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 13.

BAIT
An action comedy with Jamie Foxx, who plays a small-time crook set up by the Feds to catch a pair of gold thieves. Directed by Antoine Fuqua. Opening Sept. 15.

CRIME + PUNISHMENT IN SUBURBIA
A teen drama inspired by the Dostoyevsky novel, with Monica Keena, Jeffrey Wright, and Ellen Barkin. Directed by Rob Schmidt. Opening Sept. 15.

DUETS
Gwyneth Paltrow plays a competitive karaoke singer, in this romantic comedy directed by her father, Bruce Paltrow. Also with Huey Lewis and Andre Braugher. Opening Sept. 15.

GOYA IN BORDEAUX
A bio-pic directed by Carlos Saura. With Paco Rabal and Eulalia Ramon; cinematography by Vittorio Storaro. In Spanish. Opening Sept. 15.

HUMAN RESOURCES
Laurent Cantet directed this story of a business-school graduate who takes a job in his home town and champions a plan that may cost his father's job. In French. Opening Sept. 15.

INTO THE ARMS OF STRANGERS
A documentary narrated by Judi Dench, about Jewish children who were given refuge in Great Britain before the outbreak of the Second World War. Directed by Mark Jonathan Harris. Opening Sept. 15.

LUMINARIAS
The lives and loves of four middle-aged Latinas who live in Los Angeles. Directed by Jose Luis Valenzuela. Opening Sept. 15.

ON THE RUN
An escaped prisoner hides out in his old friend's apartment in this comedy directed by Bruno de Almeida. Opening Sept. 15. (The Screening Room.)

PARAGRAPH 175
A documentary about the persecution of homosexuals during the Third Reich, directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman. Opening Sept. 13. (Film Forum.)

THIRTY DAYS
Aaron Harnick wrote and directed this comedy about modern dating, with Ben Shenkman, Arija Bareikis, Barbara Barrie, and Catherine Kellner. Opening Sept. 15.

URBANIA
A drama about storytelling and the blurring of identity, in which a young man (Dan Futterman) wanders the streets of New York, meeting old acquaintances along the way. Directed by Jon Shear. Opening Sept. 13.

FILM NOTES

THE BALLAD OF RAMBLIN' JACK
Aiyana Elliott crafted this loving, affecting documentary of her father, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, the legendary folksinger who was both a disciple of Woody Guthrie and a mentor to Bob Dylan (who later denied Jack's influence). The son of a Jewish doctor from Brooklyn, Ramblin' Jack fashioned himself as a folksinger, and, after his early success as part of the Washington Square folk revival, he spent decades singing songs of lumberjacks, cotton pickers, and cowboys until his 1995 album "South Coast" brought him belated recognition. Father and daughter travel the United States visiting old friends, like Kris Kristofferson and Arlo Guthrie, and throughout Jack sustains a wistful, funny monologue that imparts his own peculiar brand of wisdom: "My advice to young people today: Learn how to whittle." He's a master storyteller, and it's easy to get caught up in the spell of his words and miss the film's sad core.—*Michael Agger* (Empire 25 and Waverly.)

BRING IT ON
A hyperkinetic teen movie that flirts with some interesting ideas about race, hip-hop, and the overblown world of competitive cheering but decides to smile and high-kick instead. The pert-mouthed Kirsten Dunst, captain of a successful suburban California squad, is crushed when she discovers that her team's sultry dance routines were stolen from an all-black squad from East Compton—a form of whitewashing which has a long tradition, from Pat Boone to Vanilla Ice. Without a real showdown, the film merely bounces along with a series of peppy but pointless scenes of young actresses dancing in halter tops.—*M.A.* (Chelsea West, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, and Union Square.)

BULLET IN THE HEAD
In John Woo's 1990 tale of damnation without redemption, three friends from Hong Kong try to get rich in the anything-goes chaos of Saigon in 1967, only to wind up riven by war and simple greed. Although Woo based one image—a peace demonstrator trying to face down a tank—on student protests in Tiananmen Square, the ambience of decay and the descent-into-hell narrative derive mostly from "The Deer Hunter," with a nod to Peckinpah's "Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia." For the first hour, the bloodletting is genuinely upsetting; then the picture degenerates into a prolonged masochistic frenzy. Tony Leung is the loyal and upright hero, but Simon Yam, as a Eurasian gun-for-hire, steals the escapist set piece, a shoot-out in a night club, with his mixture of competence and insouciance. In Cantonese.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Sept. 16.)

CECIL B. DEMENTED
The new John Waters picture takes its place in the long and semi-honorable tradition of Hollywood self-scorn. The title character is an underground movie director (Stephen Dorff) dedicated to the demolition of standard studio pap. Surrounded by his gang of guerrilla technicians, he kidnaps a star (Melanie Griffith) and forces her to play the lead in his latest slice of zero-budget decadence. As Cecil and his crew attack multiplexes and movie sets, it's never quite clear where they or Waters are pointing their radical rage: at the process of filmmaking, at the national theatre chains, or at those citizens of a free America who exercise their right to watch baloney.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/21 & 8/28/00.) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

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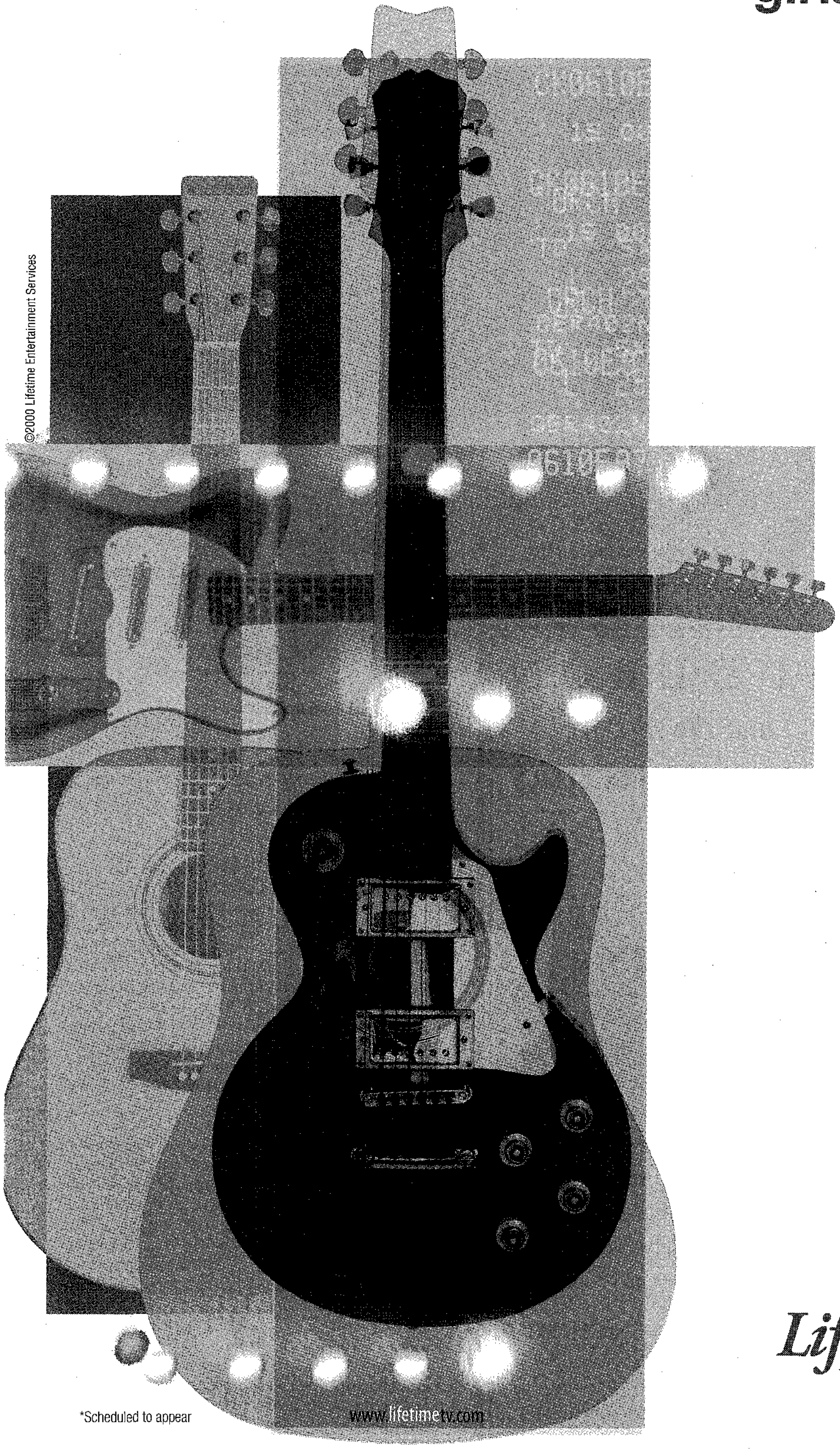
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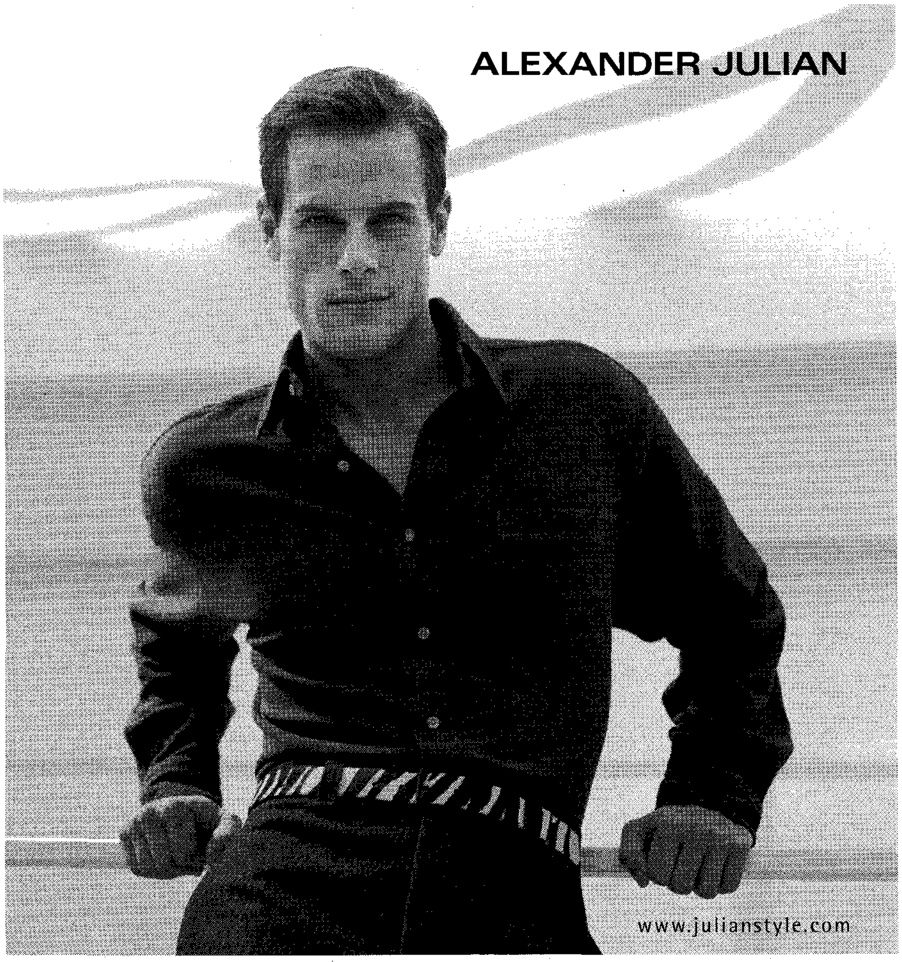

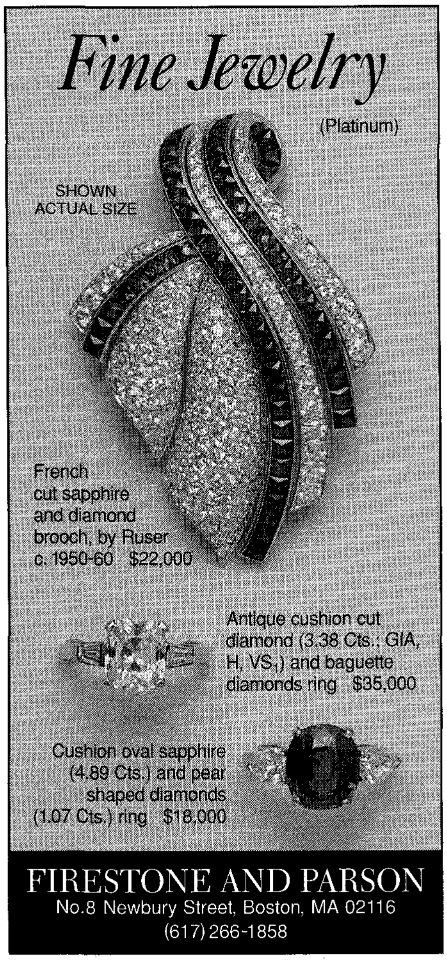
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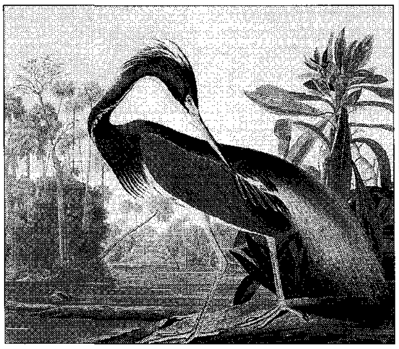

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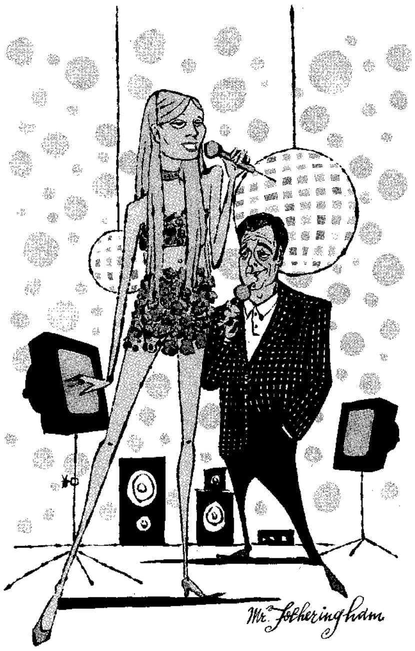
THE CELL
A man's intestines twirled around a golden spit; the pulsating organs of a dissected horse encased in glass; dead women pieced together as mechanical dolls—these are just some of the gruesome tableaux encountered by Jennifer Lopez, who plays a child psychologist who travels, via experimental drug, into the mind of a serial killer. The plot doesn't make much sense, but the imagery is arresting. The director, Tarsem Singh, made his name in music videos, and his feature début is full of intense visual trickery; he relies on surreal contrasts (snowflakes falling on a sunlit desert) and clever cuts (from pouring milk to a body drenched in bleach). Since most of the film takes place inside a psychopath's mind, the normal, comforting conventions of suspense don't apply.—*M.A.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)



Opening September 15, "Duets," with Gwyneth Paltrow and Huey Lewis.

THE DECALOGUE
In 1988 and 1989, the Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski made a series of ten films for Polish television, in which each movie, roughly an hour in length, was devoted to one of the Ten Commandments. The films, set largely around an apartment complex in Warsaw, are not so much literal illustrations of the commandments as fables inspired by them—very modern fables, it turns out, featuring relations between men and women, and parents and children, of a depth and intensity not seen since Ingmar Bergman stopped making movies in the early eighties. In Polish.—*David Denby* (6/12/00) (The Screening Room.)

GIMME SHELTER
The facts of the Altamont debacle are well known: Hell's Angels, hired as security by the Rolling Stones for a free concert at a Bay Area speedway, bullied and beat their way through the audience, eventually stabbing to death a young black man named Meredith Hunter. What is less well known, perhaps, is how skillfully the Maysles Brothers' 1970 documentary builds to that horrible conclusion. In the film's opening scenes, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, and company light up Madison Square Garden with effulgent performances of "Jumpin' Jack Flash" and "Satisfaction." But the Maysleses undermine the triumphant mood by intercutting scenes of the Stones ensconced in a cramped editing room, reviewing rushes from Altamont (including a truly wrenching shot of Hunter's stabbing, parsed and slowed for maximum effect). The pain in Jagger's eyes as he watches

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

the murder footage lasts only a moment before he papers over it with his strutting-cock persona, which in turn dissipates almost immediately. It is the collision of these two extremes—the Stones as erotic gods, the Stones as chastened schoolboys—which generates the film's enduring pathos.—*Ben Greenman* (Film Forum.)

GIRL ON THE BRIDGE

A waifish young woman (Vanessa Paradis) attempts to drown herself but is saved by a knife thrower (Daniel Auteuil) who persuades her to join his act, where she becomes both nerveless victim and indispensable muse. He whirls her from one fancy location to the next, living on the slim proceeds of their success and gazing with avuncular disdain upon her incessant amours. The movie promises to be as steely as the flying blades, and the knife-tossing sequences make you flinch; but the director, Patrice Leconte, seems unable to match the coolness of his heroine, and the story droops into whimsy. Still, here is your chance to study the phenomenon that is Ms. Paradis—a huge draw in France and the beloved of Johnny Depp, who sports a similar set of cheekbones. In French.—*A.L.* (Angelika Film Center and First & 62nd Cinemas.)

HOLLOW MAN

A cocky scientist named Sebastian Caine (Kevin Bacon) injects serum into his veins and becomes invisible. Does Sebastian do something cool with his new freedom, like turn losers into winners at Donald Trump's casino tables or perform mysterious good deeds and then disappear? No such luck. The director Paul Verhoeven is more literal-minded and crass: Sebastian fondles and rapes women and becomes increasingly violent, eventually stalking his colleagues (including Elisabeth Shue and Josh Brolin) in a vast underground lab. The movie has some extraordinary digital effects (when Sebastian is underwater he can just barely be seen—he looks like a well-toned jellyfish, shapely and translucent), but the plotting and dialogue function at the level of a third-rate thriller. An exhaustingly bad movie devoted to an idea that could have been great fun.—*D.D.* (8/14/00) (84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

IT ALL STARTS TODAY

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Cinema Village.)

LOVE & SEX

The writer-director Valerie Breiman, in her first feature, has put together an inconsequential but charming romantic comedy starring the long-stemmed, unpretentious beauty Famke Janssen as a Los Angeles magazine writer and Jon Favreau ("Swingers") as her boyfriend, a wisecracking, rather infantile painter. The movie offers little more than the latest forms of sexual banter, but the teasing mock crises are easy enough to take, and the two stars have a nice rhythm together. Janssen, with better material, could blossom into the next Julia Roberts; she's pretty irresistible even in this low-key stuff.—*D.D.* (Empire 25, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)

NURSE BETTY

A calm, sunny comedy from Neil LaBute, who is taking a break from the nastiness of previous work like "In the Company of Men." That was cinema as vivisection; this has its spasms of violence, but its target—disappointingly soft—is the delusion of ordinary folk. Betty (Renée Zellweger) is a wife and waitress who sees her husband (Aaron Eckhart, wiping out memories of his scruffy biker charm in "Erin Brockovich") murdered in their Kansas home. In blithe mental confusion, she sets off for Los Angeles, pursued by the killers (Morgan Freeman and Chris Rock), to find a fictitious doctor—the supergroomed hero of a television soap. He is merely an actor (Greg Kinnear) who can't decide how to handle the unwavering force of her credulity. Zellweger strolls and simpers through the story, while Freeman falls in love with her from afar. LaBute wants to inspect their uncomprehending obsessions, but the film feels too flimsy to bear much satirical weight.—*A.L.* (9/11/00) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Coronet Theatre, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE ORIGINAL KINGS OF COMEDY

Eager to escape the constraints of television, four black comics—Steve Harvey, D. L. Hughley, Cedric the Entertainer, and Bernie Mac—began touring around the country in 1997, and Spike Lee, using lightweight video cameras, caught their act last February in Charlotte, North Carolina. The results are pretty much sensational from start to finish: you feel the warmth of a live show and the pleasure the men take in shaping the evening. Steve Harvey can be scathing in a palms-down, slightly fey style of irritated disbelief—reminiscent, in this one respect, of Jack Benny. D. L. Hughley is small and querulous; he burns with the shrill exasperation of the put-upon male. Cedric the Entertainer does soft-bellied dance steps and offers candid imitations of ordinary folks. Bernie Mac, tall, handsome, stentorian, and fearless, says he's past his prime in bed; we don't believe him for a minute, but it's a gracious admission of mortality. Most of the jokes are about sex and family and work, and about shame, too—the humiliations too deep for ordinary people to admit. Among other things, the movie is a tender-dirty love song to women, who, Harvey says, have been scandalously neglected by the hip-hop performers.—*D.D.* (9/4/00) (84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

RAN

Set in the sixteenth century, Akira Kurosawa's 1985 epic spectacle, a variation on the theme of "King Lear," is static, but it deepens, and it has its own ornery splendor. It's a totally conceptualized work—perhaps the biggest piece of conceptual art ever made. For the first forty minutes or so, the picture is all preparation, and it seems dead, but

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then the preparation begins to pay off, and by the end the fastidiousness and the monumental scale of what Kurosawa has undertaken can flood you with admiration. The fine, harsh, percussive score is by Toru Takemitsu. In Japanese.—*Pauline Kael* (Union Square.)

THE REPLACEMENTS

N.F.L. commentator John Madden has the best lines in this sports comedy, directed by Howard Deutch, which isn't so much a movie as a series of sports bloopers set to music, plus lots of dreamy closeups. As the man picked to mold a group of scab players during a strike, Gene Hackman reaches into his acting closet and pulls out his coach's suit, but even he can't suppress a smirk at the weightless dialogue he's obliged to deliver. Keanu Reeves plays quarterback, and he and his motley crew of teammates are funny in all the generic ways.—*M.A.* (East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, 19th Street East Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

RIFIFI

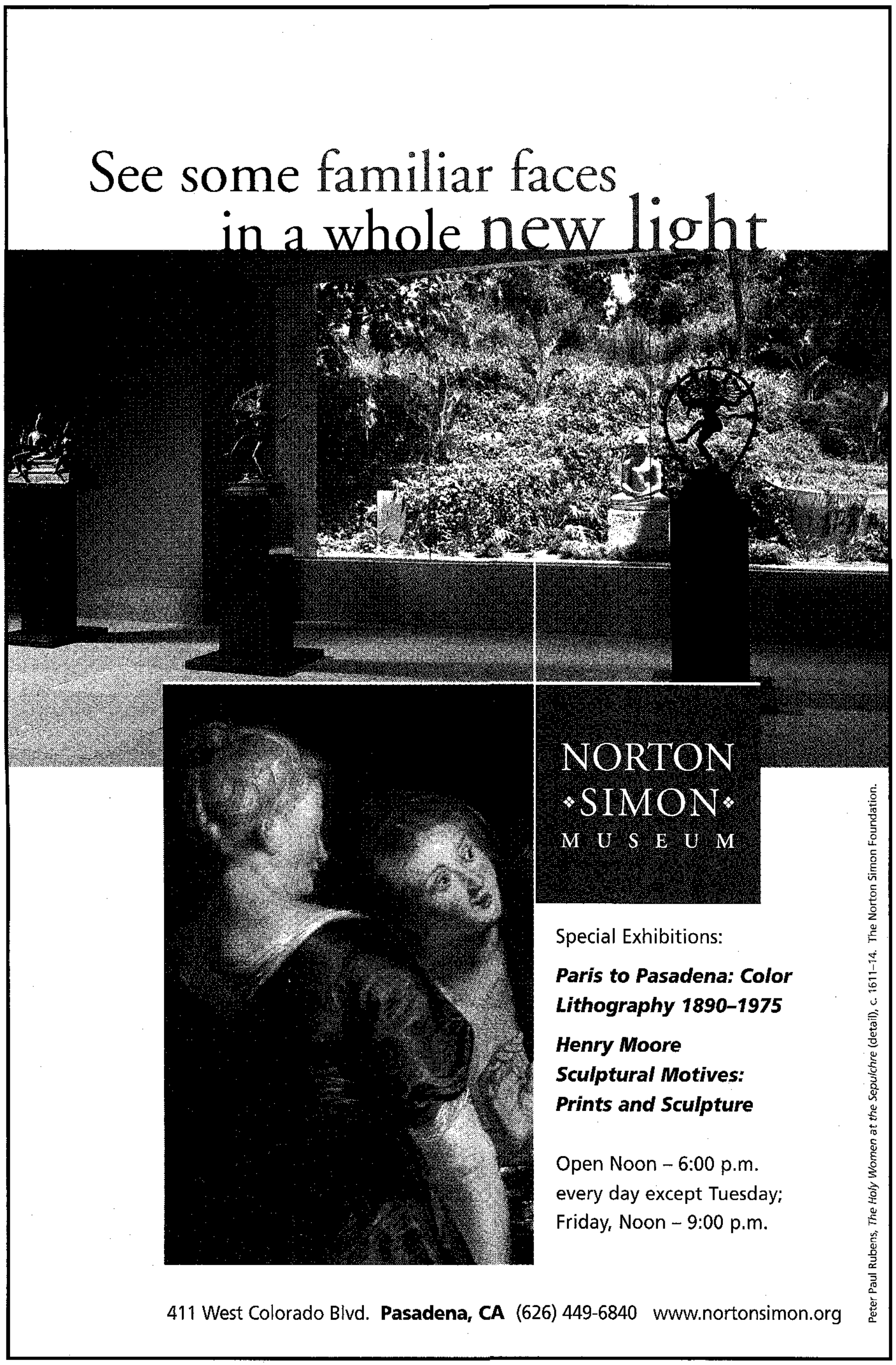
A quartet of thieves breaks into a jewelry store, and for a tense half hour we watch as they work, silently. The film is like a highly skilled documentary on how to disconnect a burglar alarm and open a safe, and it is thoroughly engrossing, because we see the criminals as craftsmen, and we celebrate their teamwork, their finesse, their triumph. Ironically, we find ourselves sympathizing with their honest exhaustion after their dishonest labor. From there on, this 1955 movie, made in France, by the American director Jules Dassin, follows the tradition of "Scarface," "Public Enemy," and "The Asphalt Jungle" (and of "Macbeth" before them), bringing the tragic, trapped figures to a cadaverous finish. Along the way, Dassin keeps things actively vicious, with glimpses of underworld prostitutes and hopheads and a murder, a kidnapping, and the thrashing of a faithless mistress, who is stripped. "Rififi" is the granddaddy of a batch of suspense films featuring how to knock over safes or break into banks and museums, but its own chief distinction is its nasty tone. In French.—*P.K.* (Film Forum.)

SPACE COWBOYS

Clint Eastwood builds a full-scale space-adventure movie around a gimmick. Four aging mavericks (Eastwood, James Garner, Donald Sutherland, and Tommy Lee Jones), Air Force hot shots from the fifties who never made it to outer space, get called into service by NASA on a special mission. It might have been a more graceful movie if Eastwood and the screenwriters, Ken Kaufman and Howard Klausner, had not joked about the men's age in every scene (James Garner is the only one who actually looks his age). Some of the hostility the men encounter (from young astronauts, for instance) is entirely unconvincing, and Eastwood's direction is a little creaky. But there are plenty of affecting and engaging sentimental moments, many courtesy of Jones. As a widower still in love with his wife, he creeps up on the audience's emotions in his peculiarly offhand way and steals the show.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

THE TAO OF STEVE

Jenniphr Goodman's comedy is set in Santa Fe, which comes across as the capital city of slackerdom; apparently entire lives can be structured around the art of the Frisbee. Donal Logue plays Dex, the portly and lovable hero, as a kind of threatless John Belushi—no one is wary of him or his bulk, and women, in particular, are drawn to his bed in spite of themselves. Dex has a book-fed philosophy of successful seduction, although the movie never really shows us his technique in action. Instead, we get melting hearts as he discovers that the cool-spirited Syd (Greer Goodman) may just be the woman for him. The story strolls along with ease, picking its way carefully between the nerdish and the hip, and the soundtrack is a memorable breeze, yet you come out feeling strangely underwhelmed. When did the movies last produce a proper Casanova, with the courage of his addiction?—*A.L.* (8/7/00) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)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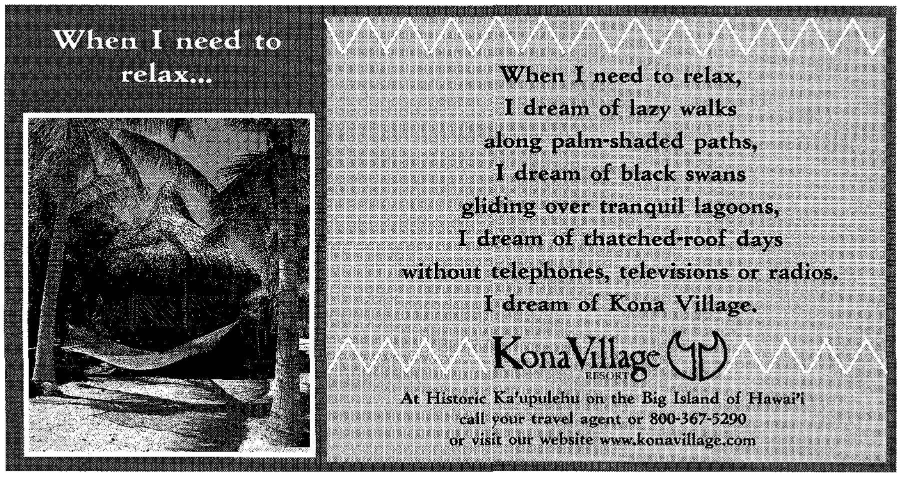
Peter Paul Rubens, *The Holy Women at the Sepulchre* (detail), c. 1611–14. The Norton Simon Foundation.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When I need to relax,
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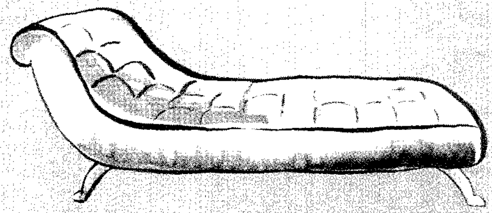
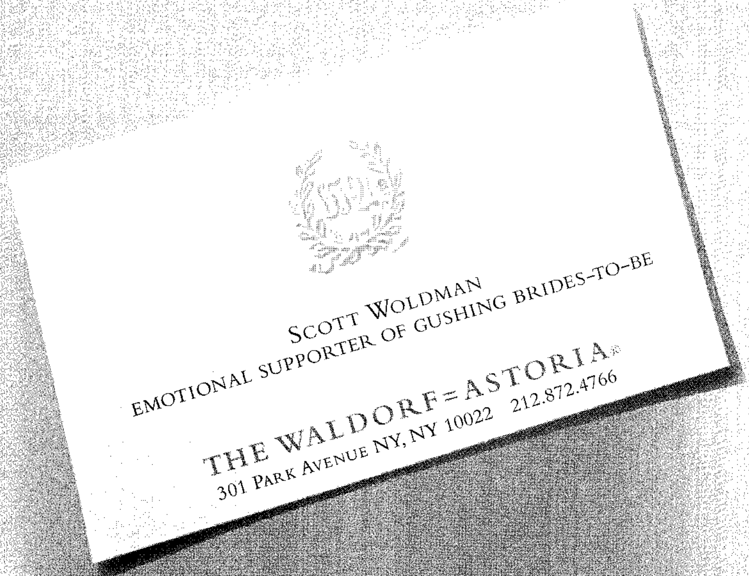


it's nice to be heard,

it's better to be thoroughly and

completely understood.



Scott Woldman

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THE TIMES OF HARVEY MILK

This lucid, empathic 1984 documentary about the first openly gay elected official in California focusses on Harvey Milk as a grassroots politician who views gay rights as just one part of a democratizing movement in San Francisco government. He rose to a seat on the Board of Supervisors in 1977, after the city moved toward neighborhood rule; in chronicling his story, the filmmakers, Rob Epstein and Richard Schmeichen, choose an array of apt yet unpredictable eyewitnesses to his ascent, including a union activist, Jim Elliot, who remembers wondering how he could tell his union brothers to vote for "a fruit." Seeing Milk through their group lens, we share in his victory and are devastated all over again when a former Board member, Dan White, assassinates Milk and Mayor George Moscone. The ensuing trial, where White employed the infamous "Twinkie defense," fills you with an impatient anger, but it in no way diminishes this movie's aching beauty.—*M.S.* (Film Forum.)

THE WAGES OF FEAR

An existential thriller—the most original and shocking French melodrama of the fifties. The opening sequence shows us a verminous South American village and the Europeans trapped in it; they will risk everything for the money to get out. An oil well three hundred miles away has caught fire, and the oil company offers four of them two thousand dollars each to drive two trucks loaded with nitroglycerine (to explode out the fire) over primitive roads. The four are a Corsican (Yves Montand), a Frenchman (Charles Vanel), an Italian (Folco Lulli), and a German (Peter Van Eyck), and the film is about their responses to the gruelling test of driving the trucks. When you can be blown up at any moment only a fool believes that character determines fate. In this situation, courage and caution are almost irrelevant, and ordinary human responses are futile and archaic—yet nothing else is left. Henri-Georges Clouzot directed his own adaptation of George Arnaud's novel. His most controversial film, it is also his most powerful. The violence is not used simply for excitement—it's used as in Eisenstein's and Buñuel's films: to force a vision of human experience. In French.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Sept. 14.)

WHIPPED

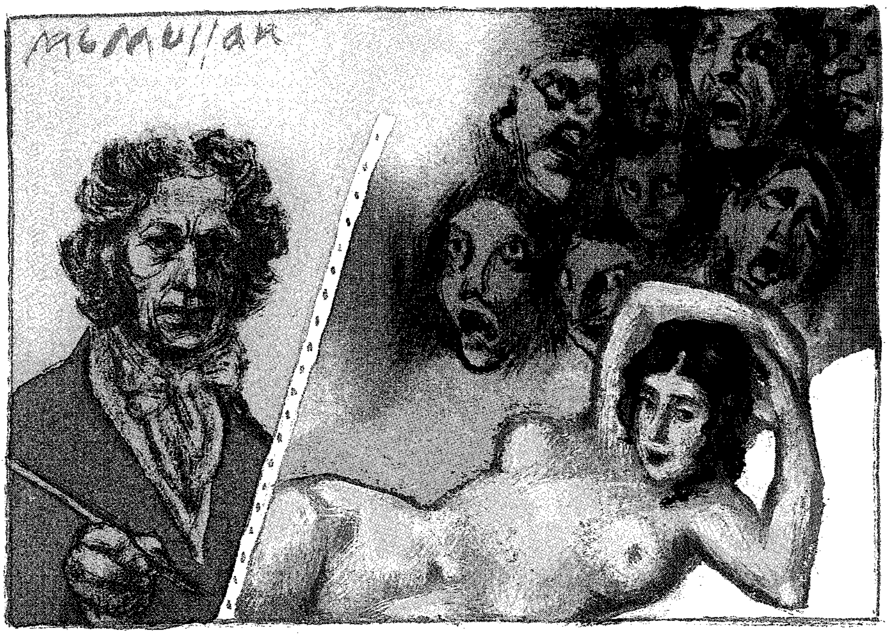
Amanda Peet, who stole "The Whole Nine Yards" from an unbothered Bruce Willis, gets a lead role all to herself and won't let go. She plays Mia, a pleasure-hunting New Yorker, who causes three men—best friends, until she arrives on the scene—to fall in love with her simultaneously. Since the three essentially vie with one another to become the most objectionable, it is hard to work out what joy Mia finds in their company, apart from the satisfaction of watching the male ego, in conjunction with other organs, shrivel and shy away. The movie is a début for writer and director Peter M. Cohen, and he's desperate to cram in as much as possible; both camera and soundtrack collude with an air of leering panic, and there's never a dull moment, although there's never an interesting one either. The moral is that women have their own strong sexual agenda; the joke is that the movie quaintly presents this as breaking news.—*A.L.* (9/11/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

THE WIND WILL CARRY US

A beautiful but limited exercise in aesthetic formalism from the Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami. An engineer from Teheran (Behzad Dourani) arrives in a small mountain village in order to record some sort of ritual that depends on the death of an old lady. But the old woman, whom we never see, refuses to die, and the engineer waits and waits and begins to question his life. He becomes friends with a little boy, and converses with a variety of people in town, some of whom are also out of sight. He drives again and again to a hilltop to get a clear signal for his cell phone so he can call Teheran and make small talk. The picture has a mournful, slow rhythm, rather like that of prayer or a stately ballad, and clearly Kiarostami is saying something about the value of putting down roots versus modern restlessness. But when life is simplified this way and then arranged into a pattern, it yields meaning without much struggle. However handsome the movie, one may feel the game has been rigged. In Farsi.—*D.D.* (8/14/00) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

X-MEN

The most beautiful, strange, and exciting comic-book movie since the original "Batman." The world, it seems, is filled with mutants—quirks of evolution and lost souls who band together for comfort and understanding. Feared by the regular humans, the mutants, according to Magneto (Sir Ian McKellen), will never be accepted, and since they are superior he believes they should either destroy the rest of humanity or supplant it. He's been engaged in a long quarrel about this with Professor Xavier (Patrick Stewart), a soft-spoken, wheelchair-bound sage with empathic powers. The film combines the fear of aliens invading us (an old sci-fi trope) with a spectacular war of the gods. The director, Bryan Singer, builds the characters and then lets the action flow from their special physical skills.—*D.D.* (7/24/00) (Chelsea West, Empire 25, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, Village East Cinemas, and Ziegfeld.)



Opening September 15, "Goya in Bordeaux," directed by Carlos Saura.

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Paris.
POLA X
Angelika Film Center.
SAVING GRACE
Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Union Square.
SMILING FISH & GOAT ON FIRE
Angelika Film Center.
SOLAS
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.
THIS IS SPINAL TAP
Union Square.
TITANIC TOWN
State.
THE WATCHER
Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.
THE WAY OF THE GUN
Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Ride Lonesome: A Budd Boetticher Retrospective." Sept. 16 at 2: "The Missing Juror" (1944). ♦ Sept. 16 at 3:30: "Horizons West" (1952). ♦ Sept. 16 at 5: "The Killer Is Loose" (1956). ♦ Sept. 17 at 2: "The Bullfighter and the Lady" (1951). ♦ Sept. 17 at 4: "Ride Lonesome" (1959). ♦ Classic movies. Sept. 16-17 at 6:30: "Five Easy Pieces" (1970, Bob Rafelson).
ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Contemporary urban cinema from Hong Kong. All films are in Cantonese. Sept. 15 at 6 and Sept. 17 at 9:45: "Expect the Unexpected" (1998, Patrick Yau). ♦ Sept. 15 at 8 and Sept. 16 at 9:45: "The Mission" (1999, Johnnie To). ♦ Sept. 15 at 10:15 and Sept. 16 at 3: "Too Many Ways to Be No. 1" (1997, Wai Ka-fai). ♦ Sept. 15 at midnight and Sept. 16 at 5:15: "A Hero Never Dies" (1998, To). ♦ Sept. 16 at 7:30 and Sept. 17 at 3: "Spacked Out" (2000, Lawrence Ah Mon). ♦ Sept. 16 at midnight and Sept. 17 at 5:15: "The Longest Nite" (1998, Yau). ♦ Sept. 17 at 7:30: "Running Out of Time" (1999, To).
BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Sept. 14 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Man Who Fell to Earth" (1976, Nicolas Roeg). ♦ Sept. 15 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Owl and the Pussycat" (1970, Herbert Ross). ♦ Sept. 16 at 1:30, 4:10, 6:45, and 9:30: "Bullet in the Head" (†). ♦ Sept. 17 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Pretty Baby" (1978, Louis Malle). ♦ Sept. 18 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Onegin" (1999, Martha Fiennes). ♦ Sept. 19 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Tarnished Angels" (1957, Douglas Sirk).
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Sept. 14: "The Golden Age of Foreign Film." Sept. 13: "Woman in the Dunes" (1964, Hiroshi Teshigahara; in Japanese) and "Cruel Story of Youth" (1960, Nagisa Oshima; in Japanese). ♦ Sept. 14: "The Wages of Fear" (†) and "La Jetée" (1964, Chris Marker; in French). ♦ Sept. 15-19: "The Times of Harvey Milk" (†).
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Sept. 28: "Oliver Stone, Filmmaker." Sept. 14 at 6 and Sept. 16 at 2: "Salvador" (1986). ♦ Sept. 15 at 2:30 and Sept. 17 at 5: "The Hand" (1981). ♦ Sept. 15 at 6 and Sept. 18 at 2:30: "Talk Radio" (1988). ♦ Sept. 15 at 8:15 and Sept. 17 at 2: "Seizure" (1974). ♦ Sept. 16 at 5: "Wall Street" (1987). ♦ Sept. 18 at 6: "The Doors" (1991).
THE SCREENING ROOM
54 Varick St. (334-2100)—Sept. 15-19: Episodes 5 and 6 of "The Decalogue" (†). ♦ Sept. 16-17 at 1: "The Saragossa Manuscript" (1965, Wojciech Has; in Polish).
WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Two films by Léos Carax. Sept. 13 at 2 and 6:30 and Sept. 14 at 3: "Bad Blood" (1987; in French). ♦ Sept. 13 at 4:15 and 8:45 and Sept. 14 at 1: "Boy Meets Girl" (1984; in French). ♦ Sept. 15-19: "The Dream Catcher" (1999, Ed Radtke).

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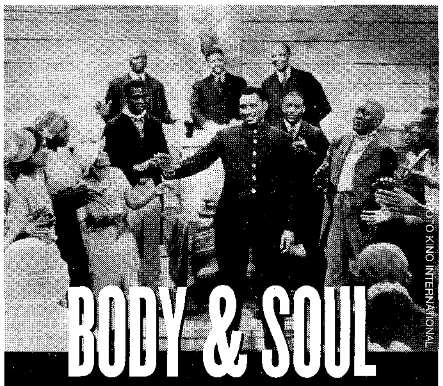

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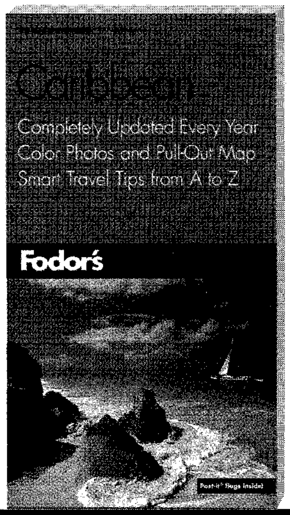
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THE
NEW YORKER

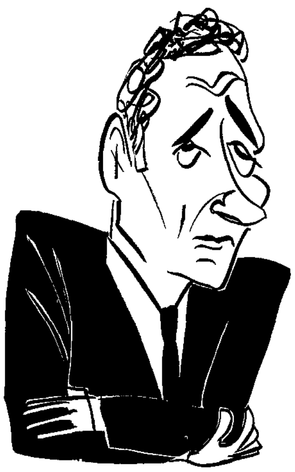
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

FIVE PER-CENTER

Over Labor Day, after eight months of prayerful consideration, George W. Bush rejected a bipartisan commission's plan for three ninety-minute, all-network Presidential debates with Al Gore and offered, truculently, to substitute one debate and a couple of joint appearances on hour-long talk shows. Non-stop bickering ensued. As Richard L. Berke noted in the *Times*, "About the only thing both sides seem to agree on is that they do not want third party candidates, namely Patrick J. Buchanan and Ralph Nader, to participate."

Buchanan—who may or may not be the nominee of the Reform Party, and whose standing in the polls compares unfavorably to the margin of error—is one thing. But Nader is quite another. The usual newspaper shorthand for him, "consumer advocate," is about as adequate as calling Joe DiMaggio an outfielder. In 1965, Nader, an obscure thirty-one-year-old lawyer, burst on the scene as the author of an exposé of the auto industry entitled "Unsafe at Any Speed," one of a handful of books published in that decade—"The Feminine Mystique" and "Silent Spring" were others—that fostered movements. With the proceeds of the book (and of a lawsuit against General Motors, which had unwisely sicced private detectives on him), Nader assembled a band of eager young lawyers and law students. Nader's Raiders eventually spawned an astounding array of organizations, all of them dedicated to using research, advocacy, and lobbying on behalf of the public good. Although he was never a member of the House or the Senate, Nader compiled an unparalleled legislative record. Among the bills he was instrumental in getting enacted were several consumer-protection laws, the Freedom of Information Act, and the laws establishing the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency. *Life* ranked him as one of the hundred most influential people of the twentieth century. Silly though such lists may be, you're not likely to find Al Gore's name, let alone George W. Bush's, on any of them. Nader, a senior citizen in more ways than one, is this year's Presidential nominee of the Green Party. Come on, now—doesn't he deserve a place up there on the platform alongside the Democrat and the Republican?



Ralph Nader

Sure he does. But that doesn't mean he should get one. Participation in the debates is not a reward for meritorious service. Nor is the debates' purpose to present the most interesting possible discussion of the issues. The debates are part of the process of choosing a President, and their purpose is to provide the electorate with information relevant to that choice. Nader is a Presidential nominee, but he is not actually running for President. As he tacitly acknowledges, he has no chance—none—of winning. What he is running for is five per cent. That's the popular-vote benchmark that would allow the Greens to get federal matching funds in 2004.

The United States doesn't really have a two-party system, because the Democrats and the Republicans aren't really parties. What we have is a two-coalition system. The Democrats and the Republicans are vast coalitions—sprawling, ramshackle, heterogeneous, and open—which approximate left and right and overlap in the middle. Their dominance is not some élite Republicrat conspiracy. It's simply the only way, given our constitutional and electoral arrangements, that the voters can have a shot at something within hailing distance of majority rule. This doesn't mean that a non-Democrat or non-Republican could never prevail; under exceptional but imaginable cir-

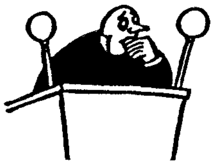
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

cumstances, an independent or third-party Presidential candidate might readily sweep to victory on some combination of charisma, Caesarism, money, and public despair. But no third party based on ideas can win the Presidency, because no set of ideas that is too weak to capture half the country can be strong enough to capture all of it. If Nader had sought the support of one of the coalitions—the Democratic one, presumably—he would have had no trouble participating in the primary debates and getting his ideas heard. He was entitled to reject that option, just as he is entitled to present himself as a third-party candidate. What he is not entitled to is an equal place in the debates.

Nader, willy-nilly, is now a politician, and now, willy-nilly, he is acting like one: for political advantage, he says things he knows to be untrue. Notably, he says that there's no difference worth talking about (or worth voting about) between the Democrats and the Republicans. This is a bigger whopper than any uttered by the Vice-President or the Governor of Texas, as Nader, whose previous career has been marked as much by practical realism as by lofty idealism, must know. But it would cost him votes to say what he apparently believes: that the differences—on social-security privatization, progressive taxation, health care, gun control, abortion, conservation, and a host of other issues—are very important indeed. They're just not as important as hoisting the Greens over the five-per-cent mark. Or maybe he doesn't even believe that. He has also been saying that he hopes his candidacy will help elect Democrats to the House and Senate. Why would he say a thing like that, unless it makes a difference after all? Maybe the most enlightening debate would be between Nader and Nader.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

THE BENCH
A MURDERER'S PLEA



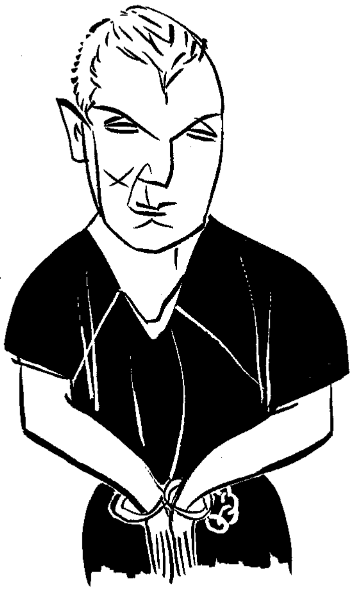
Until last week, I had never seen Michael Swango, a doctor suspected of murdering dozens of his patients, even though I felt I knew him after reporting on his story for the past three years. He was indicted by a federal grand jury earlier this summer for three murders on Long Island, but I expected him to insist on his innocence until the end—even if that meant the death penalty. He had successfully eluded a murder conviction for fifteen years.

Yet on Wednesday I sat in a federal courthouse on Long Island surrounded by relatives of Swango's victims, having heard that Swango was likely to withdraw his not-guilty plea and admit his crimes in a plea bargain with federal prosecutors. He slipped in through a side door, without handcuffs, conspicuous in his pajama-like prison garb, and everyone fell silent. He looked thinner, and his hair was darker than it was in photographs I'd seen. He was hardly the personable, handsome blond doctor I'd so often heard described when I was reporting about him for this magazine and for a book I wrote about the case, "Blind Eye." He avoided looking at anyone but the presiding district-court judge, Jacob Mishler, and his defense lawyers. When the Judge stumbled over the names of a few of the chemicals Swango had allegedly injected into his victims—epinephrine and succinylcholine, for example—Swango pronounced them clearly and explained their medicinal uses. When the Judge asked Swango how he would plead to each of five counts of murder and fraud, Swango's voice was firm: "Guilty, Your Honor."

On being asked to give an account of his crimes, Swango read from handwritten notes, coldly acknowledging that he "intentionally killed" the patients named in the indictment "by administering a toxic substance" and that he was guilty of "intentionally assaulting and killing" other patients. In all, he acknowledged four murders and four attempted murders over a ten-year period.

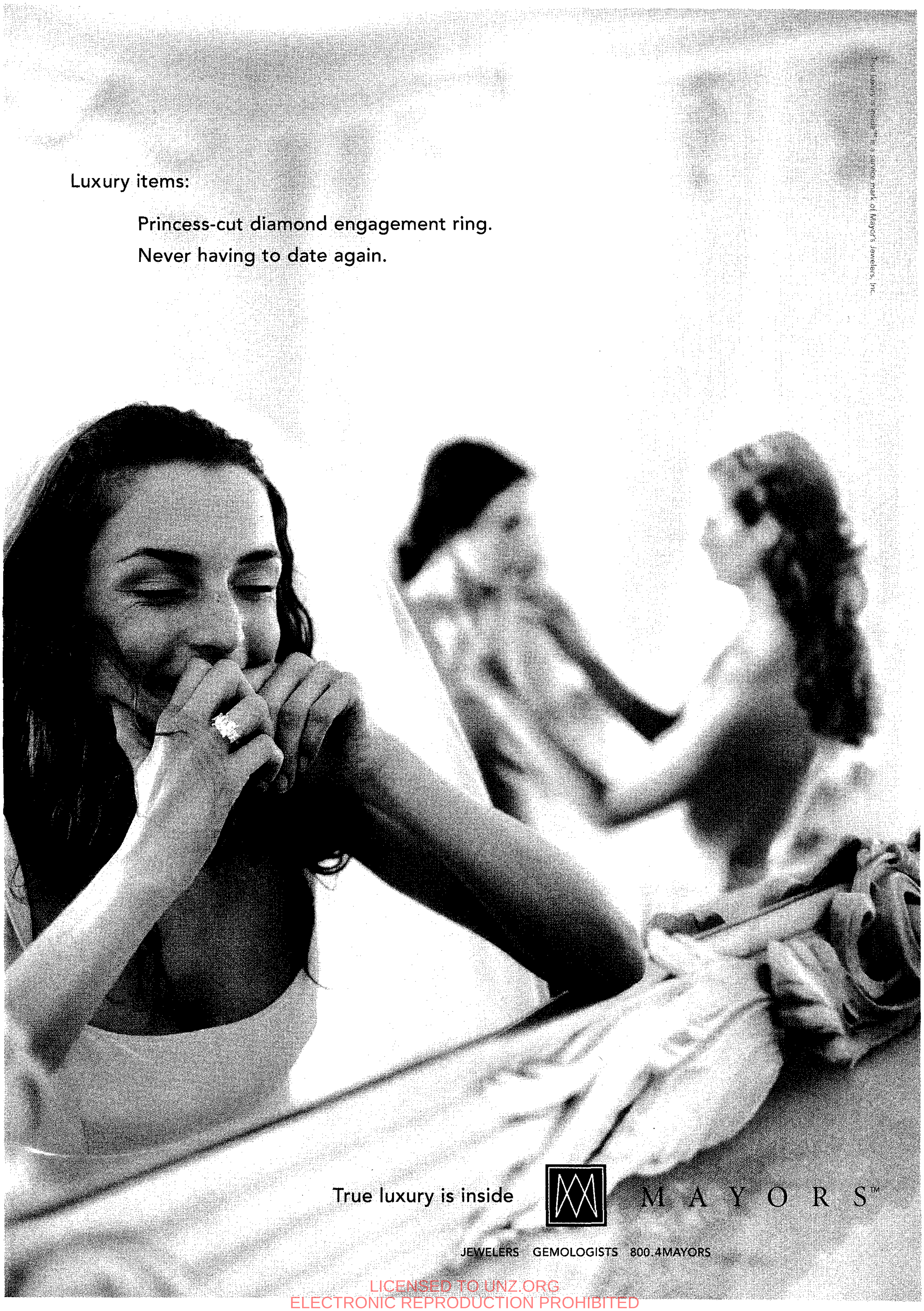
"Was it your intent to cause death?" Judge Mishler asked. "Yes, Your Honor," Swango replied. Despite the presence of sobbing members of the victims' families, Swango never looked in their direction, and he never expressed any sorrow or remorse. When he was asked by the Judge if he had anything to say before he passed sentence—an invitation to apologize—he remained silent.

It was clear that Swango was admitting only what prosecutors had proved, leaving scores of other suspicious deaths and poisonings unresolved, and he was doing so only to avoid the possibility of the death penalty or extradition to Zimbabwe, where he practiced after fleeing the United States and where he is wanted for at least five other suspected murders. The prosecutors, Joseph Conway and Gary Brown, talked about Swango with me after the hearing last week. "Any one murder, in a vacuum, is a tough case," Brown said. He explained that there were two critical breaks in the case: first, tissue samples from several suspected victims tested positive for toxic substances; and, second, an eyewitness was discovered, a nurse at the Northport Veterans Affairs hospital, who saw Swango inject one of his victims.



Michael Swango

"We looked at each patient, and then contacted everyone in every file," Conway said. "We interviewed dozens and dozens of people." When they reached the nurse, she told them that in 1993 she was helping Swango install an intravenous line into a sixty-two-year-old patient named Aldo Serini. After other doctors left the room, she saw Swango reach into the inside pocket of his lab coat and withdraw a medicine vial. Assuming that he was going to flush Serini's intravenous tube with a saline solution, the nurse offered a vial of saline, but the doctor demurred, insisting that he "had his own." Then he injected the vial into Serini's tube. Swango was on call and was occasionally paged from other parts of the hospital. But for approximately the next two hours he stayed



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in Serini's room, sitting on the radiator, and watched intently as his patient lost consciousness and died.

"That was the witness we needed," Brown said. The nurse's name hasn't been disclosed, but her story raises questions about why this information didn't surface sooner and about why the hospital's own investigation, in 1993, uncovered "no suspicious illnesses or deaths."

When Swango was finally arrested, on minor fraud charges, at O'Hare airport, in Chicago, in 1997 (en route to yet another job as a physician, this time in Saudi Arabia), he was carrying a notebook in which he had carefully copied out excerpts from books that seemed to hold significance for him. Brown read several of these in court.

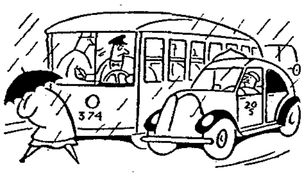
From a book identified by Swango only as "My Secret Life": "I love it. Sweet, husky, close smell of an indoor homicide."

From "The Torture Doctor," by David Franke, an account of the nineteenth-century physician H. H. Holmes, one of history's rare physician serial killers: "He could look at himself in a mirror and tell himself that he was one of the most powerful and dangerous men in the world. . . . He could feel that he was a god in disguise."

On each of the three murder counts, Judge Mishler sentenced Swango to life in prison without opportunity for parole, the sentences to be served consecutively, insuring that Swango will spend the rest of his life in prison. He added that he was directing that Swango be barred from any prison duties involving the handling of "food or drugs of any kind."

—*James Stewart*

DEPT. OF VECTORS
HOW TO INTERSECT WITHOUT REALLY TRYING



If the larger dynamic of adapting to New York City is learning to get along with others in confined spaces, then the city's intersections are the crucibles of that experiment. Last Tuesday, on the first crisp morning of fall, the human and motorized traffic moving up Sixth Avenue was even heavier than usual, thanks to the United Nations' opening session across town. The visiting dignitaries who tried to negotiate the city's choked intersections on their way to the U.N. would have been well advised to pause and watch how New Yorkers cross the street. For what the world's political leaders were trying to achieve on a global scale—getting everyone to coexist peacefully—was happening simultaneously on a local level, at just about every traffic light and crosswalk in Manhattan.

Navigating an intersection successfully means learning to anticipate what the people moving toward you are going to do. Part of the genius of the New Yorker is this capacity for physical empathy. A red light will stop cars and trucks, but roller bladers, bike riders, and pedestrians will sail through against the light, often without even slowing down. You can always spot the tourists by the way they stand at the curb, petrified, while the locals walk right into the street, instantaneously measuring the different trajectories that approaching objects will take, triangulating that information with the objects' varying rates of speed, and, finally, passing magically through the intersection unscathed.

The key to getting through an intersection is to recognize that, during the period you are in it, you are playing a role. You are a biker, a blader, or a pedestrian. You must remain true to type, because all the people with whom you are intersecting are making calculations based on the standard intersection behavior exhibited by your type. New Yorkers know that a man riding a bicycle for work—the dreadlocked deliveryman in the Day-Glo lycra and wraparound shades—is going to behave differently from a man riding a bicycle *to* work, like Mr. Businessman over there, with his cuffs neatly gartered in metal ankle clips. The guy pushing a rack of clothes (a moving obstacle indigenous to the garment district) is going to keep pushing—head down, hardly looking, hurrying restlessly through the jammed traffic—all the way through the intersection, and you can plot your course accordingly. The cardinal rule of intersections is "Never stop." (Old ladies are the only exception: you *expect* them to stop and throw up their arms when a bicyclist whizzes by.) Eye contact—between blader and dog walker, biker and cell-phone talker—is optional but encouraged, especially at those moments when pedestrians are clustered at the curb, a mass of potential energy poised to burst out into the crosswalk just before the light changes. You learn to spot the alpha pedestrians, the ones who step out first, right after the last cab sweeps by.

Once in a while, someone invents a new way of moving around the city, and the delicate dynamics of the intersection are temporarily upset. This fall, for the first time, there are significant numbers of adults riding around on those new metal scooters, and this has made getting through intersections even more complicated. Scooters, being half vehicular and half pedestrian, are strange, centaur-like beasts. The herky-jerky glide step of the scooter is hard to read: will it act like a biker and keep on gliding, or will it stop and become a pedestrian again? On Sixth Avenue last week, several near-misses were observed. But soon the scooters, too, will be absorbed into the collective consciousness of the grid, making the city's intersections safe for natives—if not for out-of-town diplomats—again.

—*John Seabrook*

THE EASTERN FRONT
PUTIN AT "21"

The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, seemed a little dazed as he arrived for dinner at "21" the other night. United Nations week had padlocked traffic on the East Side and made a mess of the circadian rhythms of the world's leaders. "I've been up for twenty hours straight, and all the faces seem to melt into each other," Putin complained wearily. Unlike his boogie-down-at-the-Kremlin predecessor, however, Putin did not immediately call for a vodka straight up. Putin is the anti-Yeltsin: cool, wary, abstemious. He seemed to regard this smallish dinner of mediacrats hosted by Tom Brokaw as a trying obligation.

For the most part, Putin's discipline held (he is, after all, a trained career officer of the K.G.B.), but there were times when he turned steely in a theatrical sort of way and, with his cold blue eyes and

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withering glance, looked rather like Frank Gorshin doing his Richard Widmark imitation. At one point, Putin leaned to his left and was greeted by the megawatt smile of Brokaw's NBC colleague Katie Couric. She was wearing a black leather dress. Putin seemed to sense relief, charm, fun. He was wrong. "So why didn't you come back from vacation when the sub was on the bottom of the sea?" Couric asked. Putin sighed darkly, took the slightest of sips from his wineglass, and allowed that, in the end, maybe he should have returned to Moscow sooner, if only for P.R. reasons.

For two hours, Putin answered questions with all the expected answers: yes, democracy and freedom of the press in Russia are barely in the "embryonic" stage; no, foreign help would not have been in time to rescue anyone on the Kursk; yes, he would like to maintain the present "balance of power" in the world, despite Russia's weakness and America's strength.

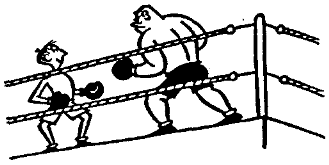
But then came those noir moments when the reserve slipped. Prodded by Maureen Orth, of *Vanity Fair*, Putin spoke bitterly about two Russian oligarchs who own enormous media properties. Of Vladimir Gusinsky he said sarcastically (or worse), "He's a citizen of Russia and Israel! *Bog s'nim!*" (Loosely: Fine, let him.) Of Berezovsky he said, "He belongs to a group of people who are difficult to blackmail. He blackmails others himself." And when Don Hewitt, of "60 Minutes," and James Hoge, of *Foreign Affairs*, pressed him about arms control Putin assured the guests (over their choice of salmon or bison) that Russia was still capable of sufficient nuclear threat: "And if we need to build something more we will work day and night."

Then it was over. Outside on Fifty-second Street, as the various guests waited for Putin to take off with his motorcade, the consensus was that he had won no hearts and didn't seem to care much if he did.

Earlier the same day, one of the bright lights of the perestroika era, Mikhail Gorbachev's liberal adviser Aleksandr Yakovlev, dropped by another media hangout, the Royalton Hotel, for lunch. It's been nearly ten years since the K.G.B.-engineered August coup failed and post-Soviet Russia was born. "All the old guys I used to know are back in one form or another," Yakovlev said grimly. "All the old coup plotters are making money in business, and we have a President who feels comfortable with Vladimir Kryuchkov"—the spymaster who engineered the '91 putsch. "If I could help vote Putin out tomorrow, I would," Yakovlev said. "But what can we do? He's very popular."

—*David Remnick*

POSTCARD FROM FLUSHING
BOXING, ANYONE?



Out in Flushing Meadows, in Queens, on a cool, cloudless night last week, banks of Klieg lights rained virtual daylight over Arthur Ashe Stadium, where Martina Hingis was trouncing Monica Seles in the U.S. Open quarter-finals. A few hundred yards away, in a concrete bunker rigged out as a boxing gym, a coach named Pete (Zaz) Zaslow watched one of his trainees punching a heavy bag, and shouted, "Hold it! Ex-cuse me! Are you playing tennis or are you boxing?"

"Whaddya mean, tennis?" the trainee, a boy of fourteen, muttered. "Zaz, man, you *know* I don't play no tennis."

"Then why're you swinging wide, like your hands are racquets?" Zaslow asked, lifting the boy's arms into position and chanting, "Elbows at the *waist*, gloves at the *face*, so you don't look like a dis*grace*."

As the tennis fans' silver and black limousines idled at the curb, the would-be contenders—neighborhood teenagers—who train under Zaslow's guidance, in the Police Athletic League's 110th Precinct Boxing Program, arrived for their evening's workout on banana bikes. The multimillion-dollar U.S.T.A. National Tennis Center had not yet been built when Zaslow first came to the gym, which is carved out of a dingy underpass beneath the footbridge that leads to Shea Stadium. That was in 1973—"when I still had some hair," says Zaslow, who is now forty-three, and keeps his head shaved, though he wears a mustache and a goatee.

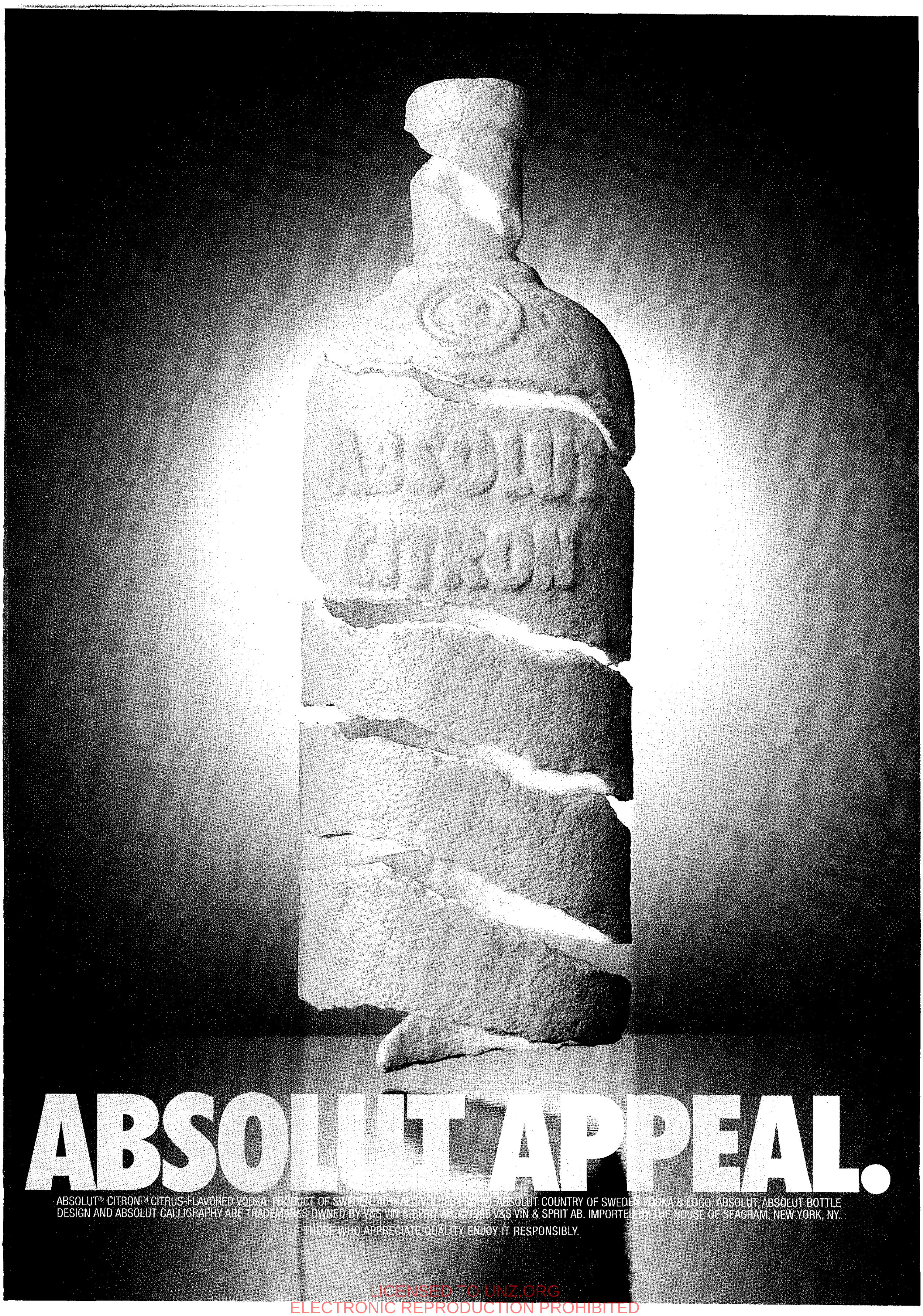
In his own days as a fighter, before he retired from amateur competition with a back injury, Zaslow had a rotten record. "I never won a fight," he said. "I never got a decision." But he loved the discipline of the ring, and, after suffering a bout of depression when he hung up his gloves, he found that coaching was his calling. He likes to rattle off the names of the gym's success stories—the champion Glenn Robinson, the featherweight Kevin Kelley, and the actor Daniel Day-Lewis, who trained here for the movie "The Boxer."

Zaslow (a part-time actor, whose credits include "Copland," "Die Hard with a Vengeance," and "Godzilla") runs his gym on a shoestring. He collects discarded fitness equipment from better-endowed institutions, and, when that fails, makes it himself. "I got gear I put together out of auto parts," he said. By day, Zaslow works for the Board of Education at his alma mater, Bayside High, and he prefers to think of the gym more as a place where boys and girls can go to get off the streets and build self-confidence than as a program for learning how to flatten opponents. Behind his desk he keeps a stack of books—a small lending library—in English and Spanish: Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men," E. M. Forster's "Collected Stories," a textbook called "España y Su Civilización," I. B. Singer's "In My Father's Court."

While Zaslow's kids trained last week, Sergeant John Doyle, a member of the Police Department's amateur boxing team, the Fighting Finest, sparred in the ring with a partner. "Maybe when you first start it's all aggression," Doyle said after his bout. "But, when you get good, aggression—emotional aggression—is the last thing you want. You want to be looking at the openings, thinking of the combinations you want to make." He added, "It's like being a police officer—you gotta leave the emotional aggression aside to focus on doing the job."

Outside, the tennis "aristocrats," as Sergeant Doyle called them, were riding off in their Town Cars. It was almost closing time, and Zaslow was stashing equipment in lockers. A friend from the neighborhood came in, a man named Hassan Waswa, who immigrated from Uganda two years ago and is pursuing a career as a professional boxer. Zaslow slapped him on the back and announced, "His uncle was one of the meanest guys on the planet—Idi Amin Dada—but he's the nicest guy." Waswa nodded his head, beamed, and said he was making plans to move to Las Vegas.

—*Philip Gourevitch*



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THOSE WHO APPRECIATE QUALITY ENJOY IT RESPONSIBLY.

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

THE MOST DEVASTATING RETAILER IN THE WORLD

Every Tuesday and Saturday, a big truck pulls up to the curb on the east side of Broadway between Prince and Houston Streets to unload its cargo. Out come stacks of soft-colored dress shirts, slim-cut black skirts, and elegant women's jackets that look as though they'd just rolled off a runway in Milan. All the pieces of clothing have two things in common. They come from a million-square-foot warehouse owned by a Spanish company called Zara, in Galicia. And, in all likelihood, three weeks before arriving on lower Broadway they didn't exist—not even as a gleam in some designer's eye.

Twice-weekly deliveries may be common in the grocery business, but in fashion retailing they're unheard of. The curse of the rag trade, after all, is the enormous lag time between the initial sketches of that new A-line skirt and its arrival in stores. Instead of reacting quickly to what customers want now, most retailers must guess what they'll want six or nine months hence. That's hard enough if you're selling televisions or bicycles. In the fashion business, it's close to impossible.

Zara doesn't have to worry about any of that. Instead of shipping new products once a season, Zara makes deliveries at each of its four hundred stores around the world (including four in Manhattan) every few days. Instead of making two or three hundred different products a year, Zara comes out with more than eleven thousand. It does not overstock, and unsuccessful designs are often whisked off shelves after just a week, so the company doesn't have to slash prices. Equipped with handheld devices linked directly to the company's design rooms in Spain, Zara's store managers can report daily on what customers are buying, scorning, and asking for but not finding. Most important, the company takes just ten to fifteen days to go from designing a product—which, to be sure, often means knocking off a hot new look—to selling it. This is the combination of speed, design, and price that last year made the fashion director of L.V.M.H., Daniel Piette, call Zara "possibly the most innovative and devastating retailer in the world."

In the process, Zara has flouted much of the conventional wisdom regarding the new global economy. Most retailers outsource the bulk of their manufacturing to Third World countries, where labor is dramatically cheaper. Most have arm's-length relationships with their subcontractors, who can be replaced quickly if they get cantankerous or unreliable. And most concentrate more on brand-building through advertising campaigns than on design and distribution. Zara does things differently. The company has never run an advertising campaign. Fabrics are cut and dyed by robots in the company's twenty-three highly automated factories, in Spain. The final assembling of the skirts, dresses, and suits is entrusted to a network of three hundred or so small shops in Galicia and northern Portugal, which function more as partners than as suppliers. Because Zara controls its own plants, it can make products in very small lots, so that, instead of gambling on ten thousand pairs of those lace-up-fly leather pants, it can see how the first few hundred sell before making more.

Zara's parent company, Inditex (which Amancio Ortega, who started Zara in 1975, founded four years later, so that he could apply the formula to other companies as well), is now the third-largest clothing retailer in the world. Its profits are growing at better than thirty per cent a year. By any measure, it gets a far greater return on its investment than its major competitors, the Gap and the Swedish retailer H & M.

The key to all this success is Zara's emphasis on speed and control over cost. "The dominant way of thinking for a while now has been, Find the cheapest country out there and get it to produce your stuff," says David Bovet, a Mercer Management consultant and the co-author, with Joseph Martha, of the new book "Value Nets." "But what Zara has said is that proximity matters. Even if you save a couple of bucks an hour by shipping the stuff off to the Third World, you end up paying more in the end, because it destroys your flexibility."

Zara's whole business is built on the idea that, in retailing, inventory is death. In a perfect world, you'd never have anything in a store that you weren't going to sell that very day. Zara isn't perfect, but it is three times as efficient at moving inventory as the Gap. Like Wal-Mart, Dell Computer, and Amazon.com, Zara can sell its goods cheaply because it sells them quickly.

So why doesn't everyone else just copy Zara? They would if they could. But Zara's intricate mix of Old Economy (do everything yourself) and New (outsource everything) is not easily re-created. The company's relationships with its suppliers are inseparable from a Galician tradition of textile manufacturing that wouldn't be readily duplicated by, say, H & M. Its factories require the kind of heavy investment that managers accustomed to the benefits of Third World labor often frown on. Zara is an integrated system, not just a collection of parts.

You can't simply adopt elements of that system and expect the same results. Consider the case of Dell and Compaq. Dell builds its computers to order, carries almost no inventory, has no retail dealers, and is thus extremely efficient. As Dell started taking away Compaq's customers, Compaq tried adopting parts of the Dell model while still clinging to aspects of its own. The result was that nothing worked well, and Compaq wound up in financial purgatory. Even in an age of perpetual turmoil, the truly successful companies are still those whose structure feels organic, and whose business is rooted in a strategy that governs everything they do. After all, it's a lot harder to knock off a two-billion-dollar business model than a two-hundred-dollar pair of pants.

—James Surowiecki

MICHAEL WITTE

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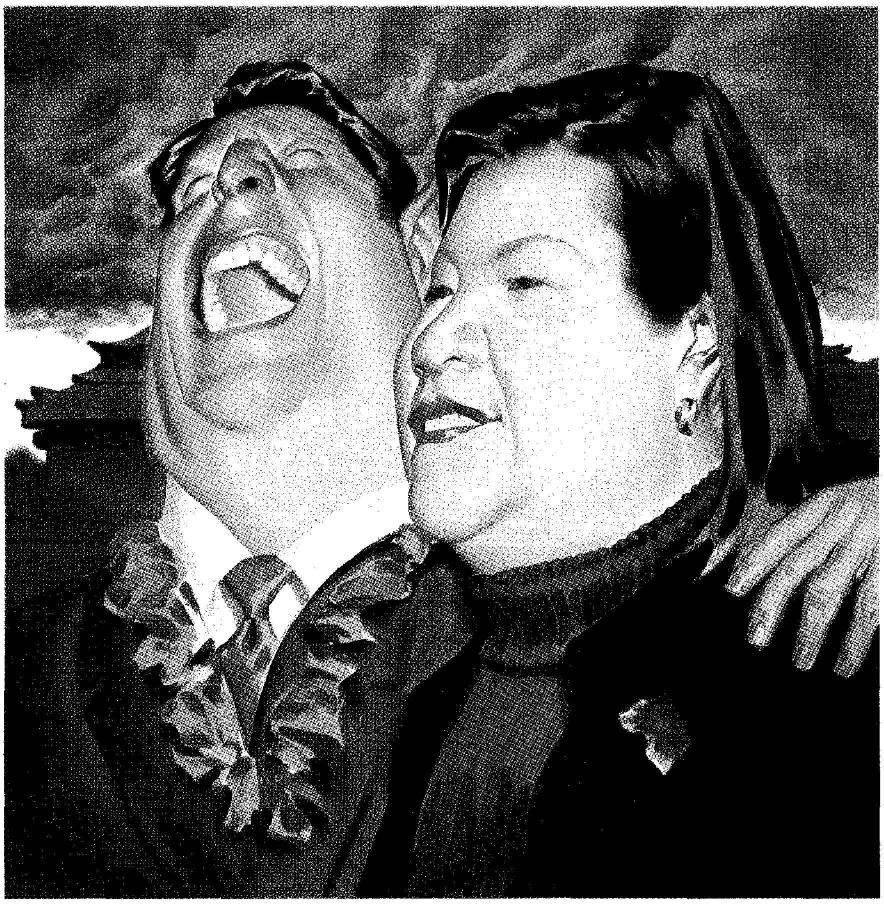
ANNALS OF LAW

ADVENTURES IN BUDDHISM

What really happened at the Hsi Lai temple?

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

Not long ago, Maria Hsia, who lives in Los Angeles, would have been pleased that the Democratic National Convention was coming to town. For more than a decade, she had been a busy and reliable activist, quick to call a meeting, make a telephone call, write a check. She had lobbied in Washington for the right of Asians to immigrate to the United States, but her real skills lay more in personal services than in government policy. She found people visas, jobs, homes, and even hot meals. For Hsia, the political convention, with its perpetual parties and networking opportunities, might have been a kind of Heaven.



Maria Hsia, who helped organize Al Gore's visit to the temple, has found herself the target of an intensive law-enforcement investigation.

DANIEL ADEL

But although Hsia was rarely more than a few miles from the convention headquarters, at the Staples Center, she spent convention week in her small apartment, on the West Side, and her one-room office, in the corner of a strip mall in the San Gabriel Valley. While Vice-President Al Gore was making his claim on the White House, Maria Hsia was wondering whether she would go to prison. Despite their divergent paths, the fates of Gore and Hsia remain linked. On the wall above the receptionist's desk in Hsia's office, there is an autographed photograph, taken in 1989, of her with then-Senator Gore, signed in his careful script: "For my wonderful and special friend Maria, with thanks and great respect and affection." In the picture, both Gore and Hsia have their hands pressed together before them, in the classic Buddhist greeting.

Maria Hsia (pronounced "*sha*") is the central figure in the most notoriously embarrassing event of Al Gore's political career. It took place not far from Los Angeles, at the Hsi Lai Buddhist temple, in Hacienda Heights, on April 29, 1996. In connection with that event, Hsia and others raised more than a hundred thousand dollars for the Democratic National Committee, some of it from Buddhist nuns and monks who were Taiwanese citizens and were thus barred, under American law, from contributing to political campaigns. In a broader sense, the Buddhist-temple event has come to stand for all the zealous fund-raising practices of the 1996 campaign, which led to accusations that the Clinton-Gore team received foreign money funnelled through straw donors. Largely because of her role in the Buddhist-temple episode, Hsia was convicted last March of five felonies in federal district court in Washington, and she will probably be sentenced later this fall. She was convicted, she says, after the Justice Department pressured her to testify that the Vice-President, notwithstanding his subsequent denials, knew that the temple event was a fund-raiser, and was perhaps illegal.

Hsia did not oblige. Nor has she previously spoken publicly about these questions, or about her own story—even as she becomes increasingly isolated. Gore and other Democrats treat her as if she were radioactive; the George W. Bush Presidential campaign is using the Buddhist-temple affair in ads as a symbol of Gore's alleged greed and slipperiness. One congressional report asserts that Hsia is also an agent for the People's Republic of China. Asian civil-rights groups, which, in the best of circumstances, are timid cousins to better-established civil-rights organizations, have said nothing in Hsia's behalf.

Hsia's timing was poor. The Buddhist-temple story appeared during a period when demands for prosecutors, and for prosecutions, had become the currency of political debate. It is only in that context that one can begin to understand how a

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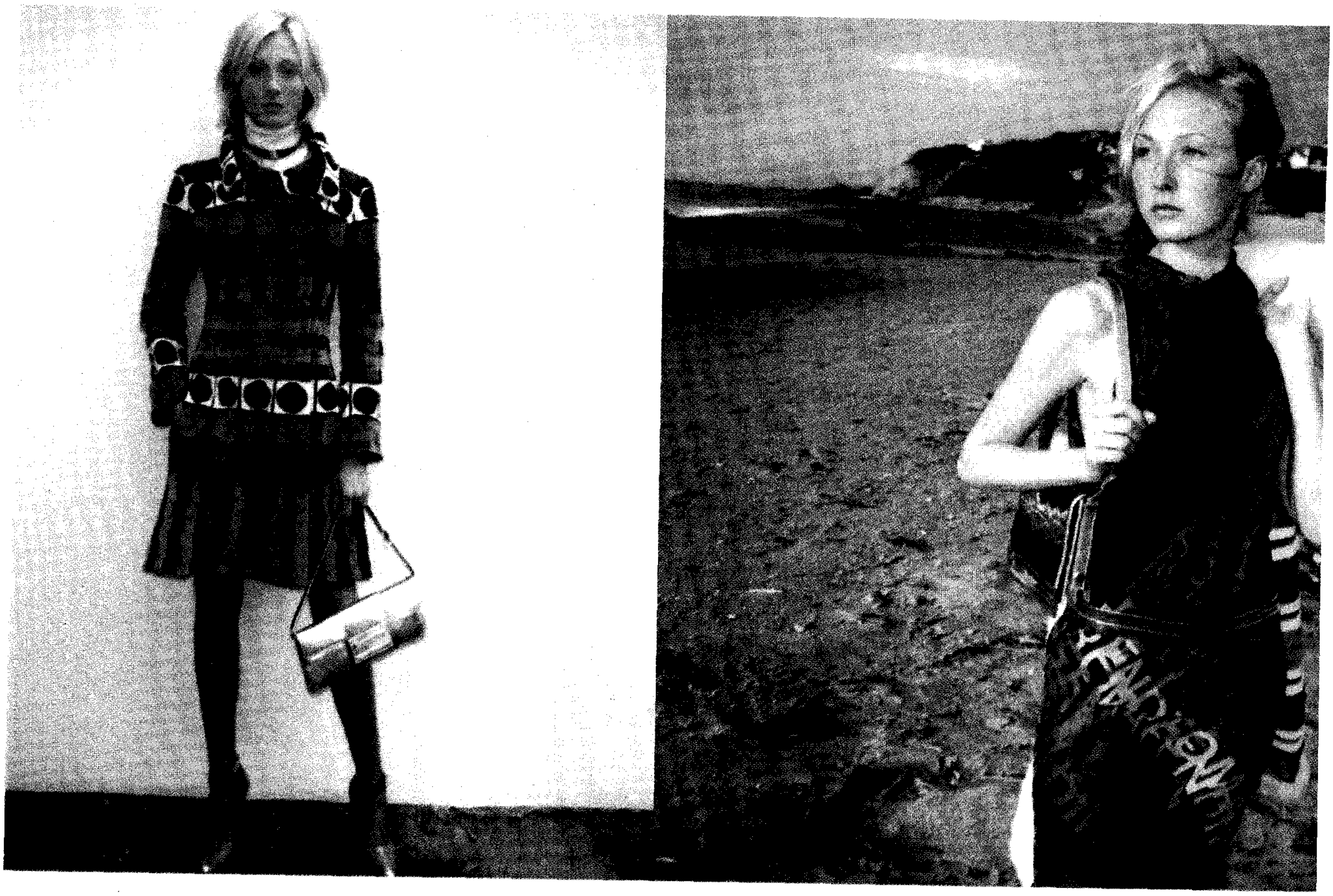


ASPEN BUENOS AIRES HONOLULU LAS VEGAS MANHASSET MEXICO CITY
MONTERREY NASSAU NEW YORK PUNTA DEL ESTE SHORT HILLS
STAMFORD VANCOUVER WAIKIKI AND OTHER FINE SELECTED STORES

successful immigrant businesswoman found herself the target of such an intensive law-enforcement investigation.

Maria Hsia, who is forty-nine, bears traces of both her Chinese past and her American present. She was born Hsia Ling, and she Anglicized her name shortly after arriving here from Taiwan, twenty-five years ago. Her accent, though, remains that of a more recent arrival, and her rapid English is not always easy to understand. Still, her hair is cut in fashionable layers, and often frosted in a rich bronze. She dresses with a chic sense of California style, and on the streets of San Marino, the wealthy town near Pasadena where Hsia has her office (but cannot afford to live), she fits right in.

Hsia is energetic, almost bubbly, an indispensable trait in her work as an "immigration consultant"—a fancy term for, in effect, a paralegal who advises immigrants on tourist visas, residence permits, green cards, and the like. Hsia relishes guiding newcomers through bureaucratic thickets, as I witnessed recently in a minor way. I had planned to drive to the Hsi Lai temple, about half an hour away from her office, and was hoping to get to a restaurant there before it closed. "Let me make a connection," she said, quickly making three phone calls in Chinese. She then informed me that though the restaurant was closed, she had arranged for a box lunch to be waiting for me at the information desk. The next morning, Hsia called me to make sure I had had my lunch.

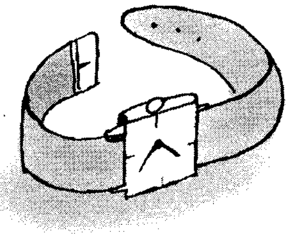
Hsia's paternal grandfather was a Shanghai intellectual, who studied in France for fifteen years before returning to a university post in China. Around the time of the Chinese Revolution, in 1949, her mother and father left the mainland for Taiwan, where her father went on to become a professor of electrical engineering, and her mother ran an orphanage that had been founded by Madame Chiang Kai-shek. In the early seventies, as the American rapprochement with the People's Republic accelerated, Maria came to Los Angeles.

"We settled in West L.A., where the Jewish people are," Hsia told me with a smile one day at a Starbucks across from her office. "You know, I'm very Jewish. Jewish people have a pride in their ancestry and their own people, even though they are American citizens. It's what I've tried to do with the Chinese." Hsia's interest in American Jewry is a recurrent theme in her conversation, but she knows that Jewish organizations and networks, like those of many other ethnic groups, such as the Irish and Italians, go back to the late nineteenth century. As the representative of newer arrivals, who have not yet put down roots, she has had to improvise.

"When I came to this country, in 1975, I went to an immigration attorney to try to get a green card," Hsia told me. "The lawyer said, Why don't you come work for me, I'll get you a green card." Four years later, one of the attorneys at the firm, Fred Fleming, invited Hsia to join him in a new venture, catering to immigrants from Taiwan. "It was the first time that attorney advertising was allowed in California," Hsia said, "and I got him a Chinese version of his name, Fu Ling Ming, which means 'Wealth, Justice, and Brightness,' and I sent it out. We offered twenty-four-hour service. At this time, the United States broke off relations with Taiwan, so Taiwan immigrants were flowing into this country."

Hsia opened a branch of the law office in Taipei, and the results were startling. In 1979, she earned $53,906; in 1982, she made $637,714 and began driving a used Rolls-Royce. "I hit a wave by luck," she told me. "There was no business concept. I identify. I share their feeling." The year she and Fleming started their business, she began living with Howard Hom, a lawyer who had worked for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and whom she and Fleming later hired. In 1986, Hsia became an American citizen.

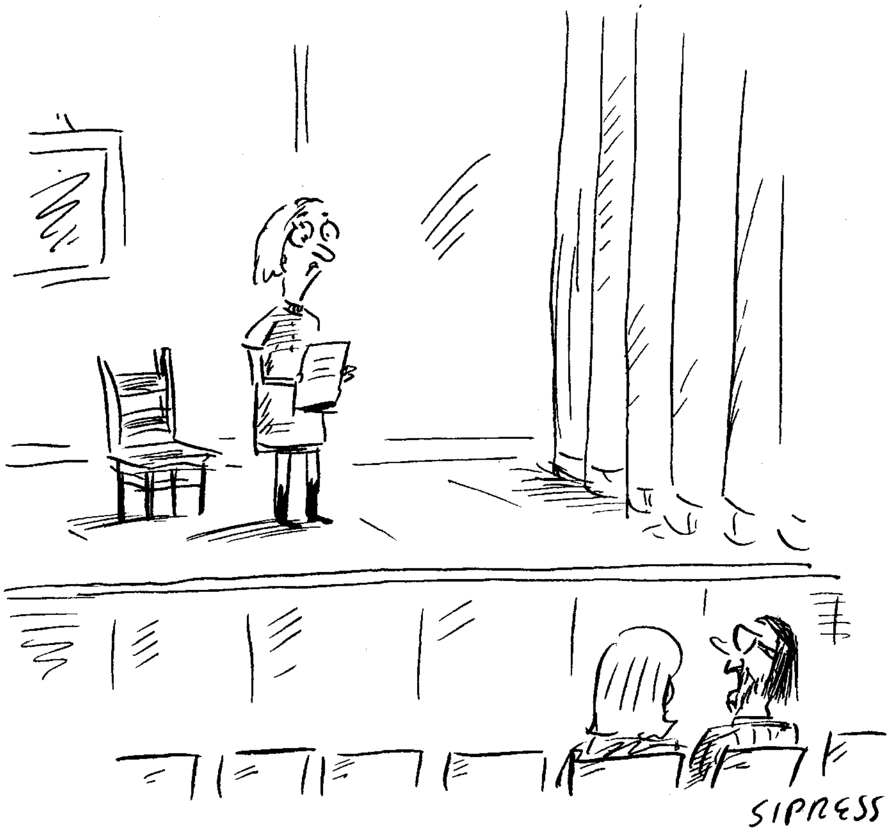
In the eighties, as her business was prospering, Hsia met Leo McCarthy, the lieutenant governor of California and, as an immigrant from New Zealand, a politician who made a special effort to introduce new American citizens to public activism. "Culturally, the vast majority of Asian-Americans stayed away from government and the political system," McCarthy, who is now retired from politics, told me. "There was a big immigration bill before Congress in those days that would have been disadvantageous to Asian-Americans who had relatives and friends who wanted to immigrate to the United States. I urged Maria and I think half a dozen others to go to Washington to make their arguments."



With prodding from McCarthy, Hsia began lobbying local politicians on immigration issues and other matters important to the Chinese community. (For example, she worked in support of the California "duck bill," a state law that permitted the display of Chinese-style roast duck in grocery stores and restaurants; health inspectors had often objected to the custom on sanitary grounds.) Hsia started working as a political activist, too, for an eclectic group of politicians, including McCarthy, who was running for the Senate in 1988; Senator Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican who is married to a Chinese-American woman; and Senator Paul Simon, of Illinois, a Democrat whose parents had been missionaries in China. "He told me he was the only United States senator who knew how to play mah-jongg," Hsia said of Simon.

By the late eighties, Hsia had noticed that Jewish lobbying groups were very successful when they arranged trips for politicians to visit Israel. (Hsia herself visited Israel on one of the junkets, to see how it was done.) In 1988, at McCarthy's urging, Hsia helped organize a fund-raiser for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, in Los Angeles, and her group of Asian activists was given a grand title, the Pacific Leadership Council. Shortly before that year's election, the group invited several Democratic senators to join a delegation to visit Taiwan the following January, and Hsia organized about a dozen Asian-American activists to accompany them. In the end, only one senator agreed to join the delegation: Al Gore, of Tennessee.

In keeping with the customs of these overseas visits, the council had to find a sponsor in Taiwan to pay for that part of the trip. One member suggested Master Hsing Yun, the founder of the Fo Kuang Shan order of Buddhism. At the time, both Hsia and Gore seem to have been unfamiliar with Buddhist beliefs and rituals. "I was raised a Catholic, so that visit was really my first contact with Buddhism," Hsia recalled. Indeed, ignorance about the nature of contemporary Buddhism has led to a great deal of confusion about the saga of Maria Hsia and Al Gore. Donald Lopez, a professor of Buddhist studies at the University of Michigan, suggests that Americans would find it helpful to think of two kinds of Buddhism, which he describes as "white" and "immigrant." "White Buddhism is what most white Americans tend to think of as Buddhism," Lopez told me. "It tends to come out of Tibetan Buddhism—the teachings of the Dalai Lama—and Zen Buddhism. It's what attracted the Beat poets and Richard Gere. Immigrant Buddhism is very different," Lopez went on. "Since the nineteen-seventies, there has been a major Buddhist revival among the Taiwanese, a kind of yuppie Buddhism, for people who are making money. It's very much anti-Communist in spirit, and these Taiwanese Buddhist temples have become very wealthy. They own land, run businesses, and encourage their members to be successful out in the world."



"O.K., the role you're auditioning for is a struggling actress who's always boring people with stories of how this one or that one got the part she deserved because she's younger or prettier. Think you can handle it?"

• •

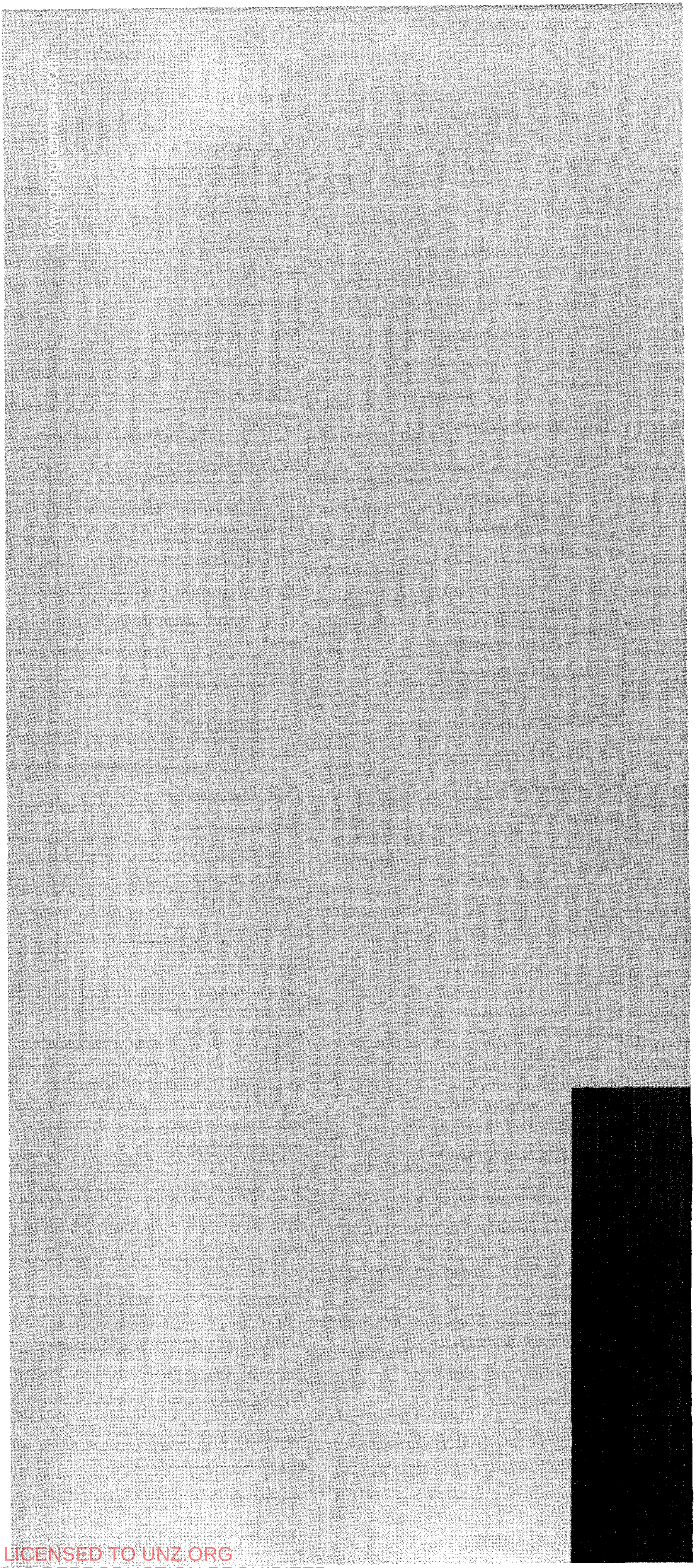
Buddhism is, in fact, practiced in many different ways, including some that place a high value on engagement with the temporal world. Master Hsing Yun's order, which Hsia and Gore first encountered in Taiwan, is intensely worldly, highly political, and very prosperous, with an estimated net worth of more than four hundred million dollars. Fo Kuang Shan, which is based in a large complex of temples in southern Taiwan, is probably the most successful of "yuppie Buddhist" orders in Taiwan.

Master Hsing Yun put on a show for Gore and his group when they visited, on January 11, 1989. "Normally in Taiwan they send a limo for a dignitary, but they sent a hundred orphans in a big school bus, singing songs from all over Asia," Hsia told me. "We had lunch there around a huge table, with an electric lazy Susan. It was food for kings and queens. The master had a museum there, underground, that seemed like Buddhaland, like Disneyland." The visit made an impression on Gore. This April, in a deposition to the Justice Department's Campaign Financing Task Force—which has been investigating the temple event, among other matters, for almost four years—he said that Hsing Yun "was very proud of an exhibit that they had that depicted different religious stories in Buddhism in a kind of a diorama-type way, life-size sculpted figures."

What made the biggest impression on Maria Hsia was an exchange between Hsing Yun and Gore, just before the group left. "Before I came to the temple, I heard people say that the master has a third eye, so he can see the future," Hsia told me. "And near the end they were in a courtyard, and all of a sudden the master said to Gore, 'You look Presidential. And you will be the President of the United States.' I can still see Gore's face. He was so happy. He smiled and said, 'If I do become President, I'll come visit you.' But then the master said he didn't have to come so far. He said, 'I have the largest Buddhist temple in the Western Hemisphere.'" Hsing was referring to the Hsi Lai temple, which had just been built; Hsi Lai means "Coming to the West." "You can save the long travel and come see me in Hsi Lai," Hsing told Gore.

Two years after Hsia's visit to Taiwan with Gore, her life was turned around. In 1991, she came back from another trip to Taiwan to find that Howard Hom, who had moved out of their apartment the year before, had installed a new girlfriend, a lawyer, in Hsia's office. Hsia withdrew from civic activity and concentrated on trying to re-start her career on her own. She also became embroiled in a legal fight with Hom over ownership of the business. After nearly a decade, the lawsuit between them remains before the California courts. Partly as a consequence of her troubles, and partly because of the impression Master Hsing Yun had made during the 1989 visit, Hsia began to turn to Buddhism.

"After that trip to Taiwan, I decided to go to Hsi Lai temple and see what it was about," Hsia told me. "I took my mother." Unlike her mother, Hsia never formally



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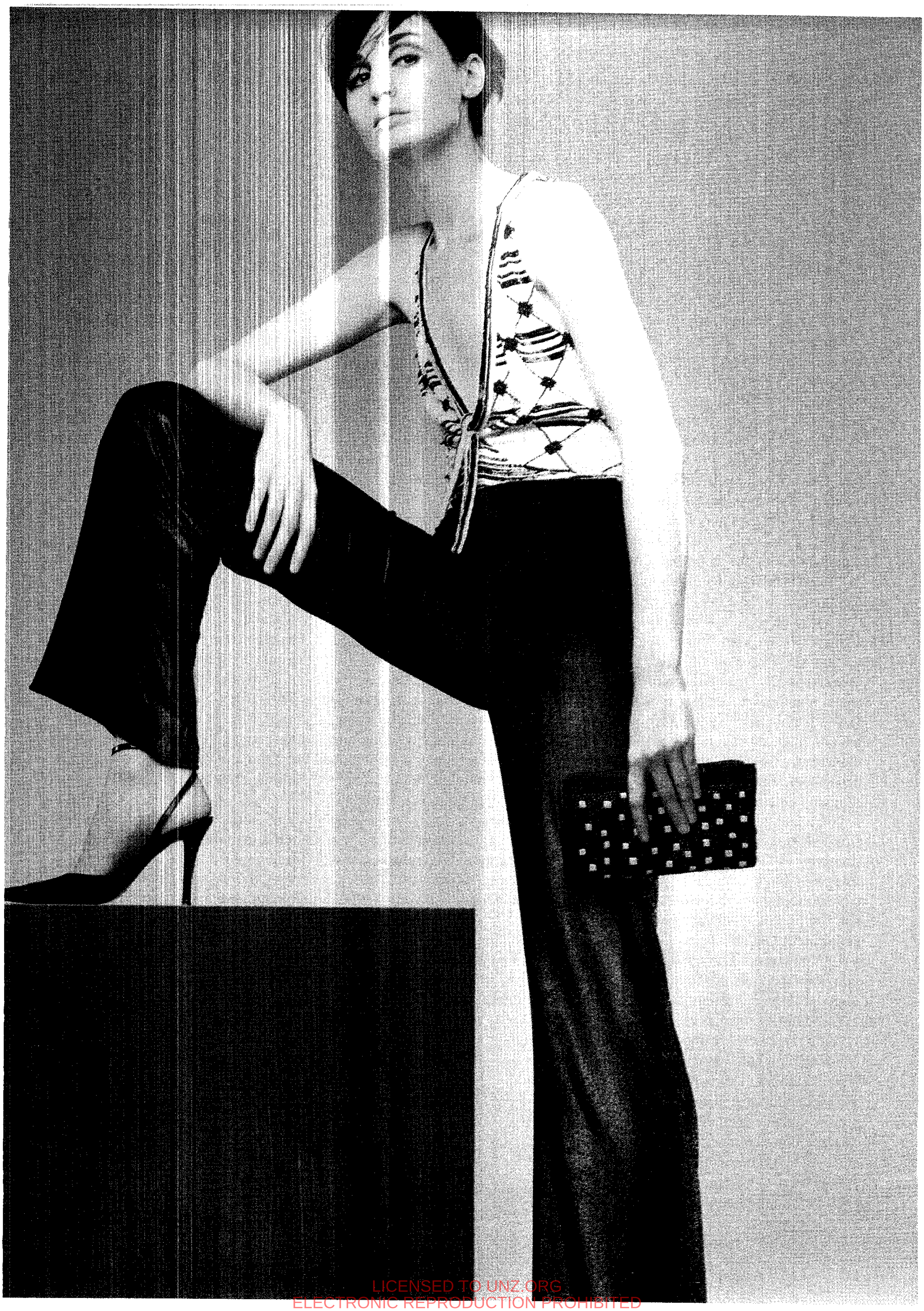


joined the temple, but her close association with Hsi Lai, she believes, has given a Buddhist cast to her outlook on life. "I believe in cause and effect," she told me. "There is no one in Buddhism who tells you that you are right or wrong. Every time you do something, you will receive the effect. You create your own karma."

The temple, which opened in 1988 and reportedly cost thirty million dollars, is a fifteen-acre complex of half a dozen buildings. It attracts a steady stream of visitors—worshippers, tour groups, guests—at its many festivals and celebrations. Not surprisingly, the temple's relations with its immediate neighbors, mostly wealthy and white, have been chilly. "The neighbors are very mad about the sightseeing buses, about firecrackers, about traffic, about trash," Hsia said. "My mother knew about this, and asked me to help them. So I start helping them with their problems." At her mother's insistence, Hsia charged the temple little or nothing for her services.

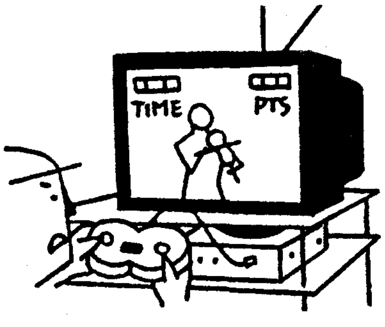
While Hsia was advising the temple, in the early and mid-nineties, and cutting back on her own political activities, a friend named John Huang, a former Commerce Department official, had accelerated his. During the Clinton reelection campaign, Huang took a job at the Democratic National Committee and made a project out of cultivating Asian-American donors. He solicited about three million four hundred thousand dollars in contributions to the D.N.C., but the Party returned more than half that amount, because in many cases the money came from actual or suspected foreign sources. Huang has since pleaded guilty to conspiring to violate the campaign-finance laws in the early nineties, and has been sentenced to a year's probation. Though he has testified extensively, before Congress and in Hsia's trial, he has always asserted that Hsia, to his knowledge, broke no laws.

Early in 1996, Huang learned that Master Hsing Yun would be visiting the United States, and, since he was working at the Democratic National Committee, he helped arrange a ten-minute meeting between Hsing Yun and Gore at the White House on March 15th. At that meeting, as Huang testified at Hsia's trial, Hsing Yun reiterated his invitation to Gore to visit the Hsi Lai temple, and the Vice-President sounded receptive. This gave Huang an idea. In his testimony, he said, "I hopefully used this kind of visit to round up some support from the community, and I would be able to raise some money that way."

Huang learned that Gore would be in Los Angeles on April 29th to speak to the National Cable Television Association, so he planned a pair of events around the Vice-President's speech: a fund-raising lunch at a local restaurant and a rally at the Hsi Lai temple. Huang asked for help from his friend Maria Hsia. In enlisting Hsia, Huang testified at her trial, he thought that he was doing her a favor. By withdrawing from politics when she did, Huang said, Hsia had "missed out" on the Democrats' victory in 1992. "I felt strongly President Clinton will be elected again," Huang said. "And I would have hoped she could come back and hopefully will also enjoy some fruits of that."

Hsia told me, "John was planning an Asian Democratic National Committee event at Harbor Village," a restaurant near the temple that was used for many political fund-raisers. "And he wanted to do an Asian rally, too. John is very ambitious. He said the President or the V.-P. always goes to black or Jewish events, but never Asian. He thinks the temple is an obvious place to do it, because you don't have anywhere else with enough space. To me, I don't care one way or the other, because I am out of politics at that point." In March of 1996, Hsia wrote to Gore, "John Huang has asked me to help with organizing a fund-raising lunch event, with your anticipated presence, on behalf of the local Chinese community. After the lunch, we will attend a rally at the Hsi Lai Temple."

As the Los Angeles visit drew near, the Vice-President's staff realized that he wouldn't have time to make it to both the lunch and the rally. In any case, advance sales for the fund-raiser had been modest. So, in what turned out to be a fateful decision, Huang and others at the Democratic National Committee cancelled the event at Harbor Village and invited the paying guests to join the larger crowd that was expected at the temple. The rejiggering of Gore's schedule raised a question that has taken on considerable importance. What, then, was the event that ultimately took place at the temple on April 29th—a fund-raiser, a rally, or something else?



As far as Gore is concerned, there seems little doubt that he regarded the event as a rally, which was how it was described in his briefing book for the day. In his testimony earlier this year, Gore remembered his reaction after making his speech to the cable executives. "The day was so cram-packed that I did not have a chance at the beginning of the day to read completely through the briefing memos for every event," Gore said. "And after I caught my breath from making this speech . . . I flipped, took out my notebook and flipped to the next event, and my immediate impression was, good, they finally, they were able to work out this visit to the Hsi Lai temple; this ought to be interesting. Little did I know."

A videotape of the event supports Gore's assertion that it was not a fund-raiser. Master Hsing Yun's greeting to the Vice-President in 1996 closely resembled his welcome to Gore in Taiwan in 1989: a band playing on a sun-splashed plaza, a brief tour of the compound, and then a procession to the lunch. Maria Hsia, who had returned from China only the day before, sat between the two men and translated. There were no tickets to the lunch, money was never discussed and none changed hands, and most of the people in the audience, of more than a hundred, had never given money to the Democrats and never would. (Only fifteen of the guests who had paid to go to Huang's aborted restaurant fund-raiser, and who contributed a total of around sixty thousand dollars to the Democratic National Committee, came to the temple.) The people at Gore's table included Don Knabe, an elected Republican county supervisor, and an unlikely guest at a Democratic fund-raiser. Hsia recalled of Gore, "He praised the food, asked what each dish was. I remember he ate a lot."

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tolerance and diversity. ("We believe that one reason so many people from other nations often look to the United States as a place where hope for the future of the world is nourished is because of the tolerance that is part of our reason for existence," Gore said.) Outwardly, then, the event appeared to be a rally. But, as with many issues that concern campaign finance, it still raised legal questions, as Hsia herself seems to have recognized at the outset.

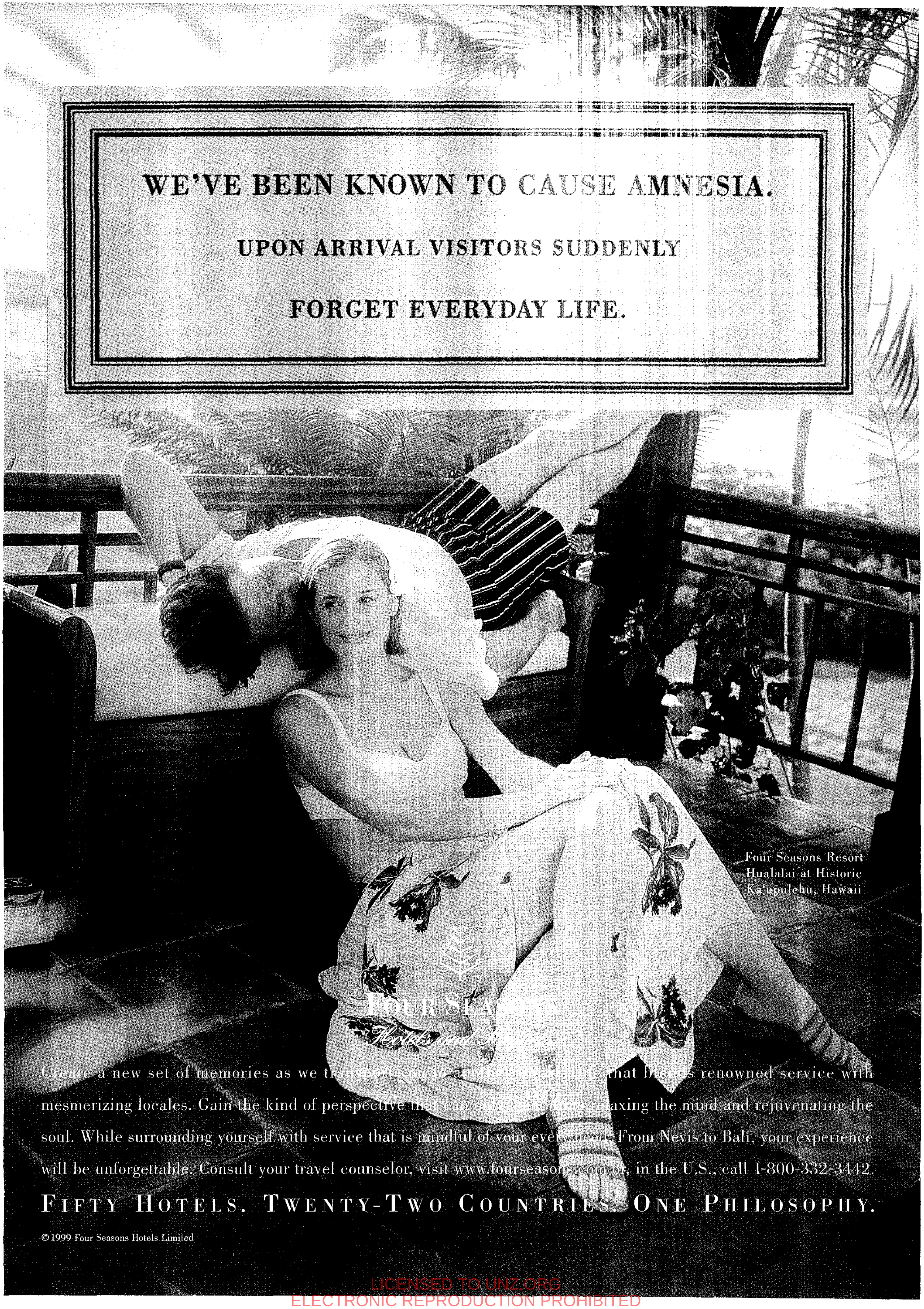
Hsia had spent most of the month before the event in China, travelling with an American lawyer who had asked her help in obtaining permission to open the first Outback Steak House on the mainland. "John contacted me in China and said, 'Gore does not have time to do two events,' " Hsia told me. "He had sold some of the tickets. Could he borrow the cafeteria, to have those people at the temple, too? I said, 'O.K., let me speak to the abbess.' So I called her and she said fine."

Hsia insists that she was always aware of potential legal problems surrounding the use of the temple for political purposes. "I asked John, 'Do you have to get permission from the D.N.C. to do this, because I know this is a religious facility?' " she told me. "He said the legal people had told him that since all the politicians do events in the basements of black churches they don't see any problem with the temple. So the two events were combined."

Whatever the precise nature of the temple event, there definitely was fund-raising going on around it—and it was this activity that led to allegations that Huang and Hsia had participated, in effect, in a laundering operation for foreign money. On April 30th, a day after Gore left Los Angeles—for an event in San Jose, which was clearly designated a fund-raiser—Huang called Hsia and said that he had hoped to come up with some more money for the D.N.C. "He said, 'I'm leaving tomorrow night on the red-eye,' " Hsia recalled. " 'Can you call the temple and see if there are any checks to be collected?' I met John in the waiting room of the temple the next day." In the waiting room, a temple official gave an envelope to Hsia, who gave it to Huang. There were checks in the envelope totalling a hundred thousand dollars, mostly from monks and nuns who were later reimbursed by the temple for their contributions. Hsia claims that she didn't know what was inside the envelope; and, if there were checks, she didn't know who wrote them. She says she told Master Hsing Yun that the temple's American lay members, known as "devotees," should become more politically active, as campaign contributors, among other things.

In the light of these activities by Huang and Hsia, it is understandable that Gore's critics and political opponents can describe the temple event as a "fund-raiser." Still, owing to the complexity of the campaign-finance laws, it remains unclear whether this kind of event would have been unlawful. If the event was a fund-raiser, though, it would have been improper, because nonprofit institutions are not allowed to make in-kind contributions to political campaigns.

Then, there is the propriety of contributions by the monastics—an aspect of the case which has drawn the sharpest criticism. George W. Bush said in a recent speech, "It's amazing that Vice-President Gore is talking about campaign funding when he's the person who went to a Buddhist temple to raise money from people who made a vow of poverty." But, as Hsia knew from handling immigration matters for the temple, the monastics took no such vows. "In most religions, the minister or the priest gets paid a salary and has his own pot of money," Hsia said. It has been otherwise for Eastern religions, she added. "All the monastics, they sell books, they have money, they put their money into a pot for the temple. They earn their money. It's culture and tradition. Each monastic has a small checking account, but any who need more money than that, they go to the treasurer and ask for it. They



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don't ever take a vow of poverty. That's Christianity. In Buddhism, the master encourages people to do business, make money. Some of the monastics, I know, they have a lot of money."

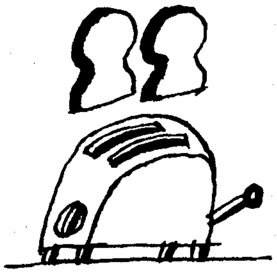
At the time, the temple event received little public notice. Then, in the final weeks before the 1996 election, the first allegations were made of improper fund-raising by the Clinton-Gore campaign—including stories of White House "coffees" for contributors and overnights in the Lincoln bedroom—and reporters began reëxamining Gore's visit to the Hsi Lai temple. Some journalists had help from an important inside source: Howard Hom. Hsia's estranged boyfriend and business partner, who was not identified by name in the stories, portrayed Hsia as an aggressive and demanding fund-raiser with little concern for legal niceties. The stories drew on documents that Hom had kept after he evicted Hsia from their offices years earlier, but they failed to note that Hom had an incentive to disparage Hsia: they were still fighting in court over the business. Shortly after the 1996 election, the Justice Department announced that it would conduct a criminal investigation of the temple event, and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, chaired by Fred Thompson, of Tennessee, announced public hearings on what was becoming known as "the China connection."

From the moment the campaign-finance investigation began in earnest, in early 1997, one political issue was dominant: Would Janet Reno, the Attorney General, ask for an independent counsel to investigate Al Gore's role? Because Gore was certain to run for President in 2000, the stakes were high. Republicans said that Reno had an untenable conflict of interest; Justice Department officials responded that there was insufficient proof of wrongdoing by the Vice-President to warrant an independent counsel, and asserted that they could be trusted to investigate the scandal. Although Hsia had little way of knowing it at the time, this political stalemate placed her in great jeopardy.

The Justice Department, which then established the Campaign Financing Task Force, quickly offered immunity to several people affiliated with the temple—but not to Maria Hsia. As someone who had an independent, if limited, relationship with the Vice-President, Hsia was an obvious target for prosecutors, who wanted to show that the Justice Department wasn't protecting Al Gore.

In the summer of 1997, Thompson opened his hearings, and chose to make the temple event the centerpiece, complete with orange-robed nuns in a Capitol hearing room. This put increased pressure on the Justice Department to act. Also around that time, the task force opened a criminal tax investigation of Hsia, threatening a tax prosecution on top of the campaign-finance inquiry. Charles La Bella, the head of the task force, was a former organized-crime prosecutor, and was employing the strategy that had brought down Al Capone. "In light of all this, it was clear that they expected Maria to plead guilty and testify for them," Nancy Luque, Hsia's Washington-based lawyer, told me. "But Maria refused to plead guilty to wrongdoing."

Bad as all this was for Hsia, there was worse to come. On November 14, 1997, Bob Woodward, writing in the Washington *Post*, cited "senior U.S. government sources," with access to "electronic surveillance," who said that Maria Hsia "was 'doing the bidding' of Beijing as a Chinese agent." (The charge was made in the final report of the Thompson committee, which said that "Hsia has been an agent of the Chinese government, that she has acted knowingly in support of it, and that she has attempted to conceal her relationship with the Chinese government.") The accusation seems far-fetched. After all, Hsia was born in Taiwan, maintained close ties there, and came from a family that had fled the Communist revolution on the mainland. Master Hsing Yun is also known as a strong anti-Communist. A little-known family secret made the charge even more difficult to believe: Hsia's grandfather had remained in Shanghai when the rest of the family immigrated to Taiwan. During the Cultural Revolution, he had been tortured and his legs had been amputated. The government, though, did not see her role in Cold War terms. "My feeling was it wasn't ideological with her," one government investigator told me. "I see her more as an opportunist."



Luque demanded that the F.B.I. allow Hsia to confront the charge, and she was interviewed by agents. According to Luque, the interview focussed primarily on some routine assistance that Hsia had provided to an American citizen who was stranded in France. "We have to be fair to people and let them see the evidence against them, but we also have an obligation to the American people to describe what went on in the last election," Senator Thompson told me, adding that he had hoped the Administration would have declassified the evidence about Hsia. This most damaging of charges has not been proved.

Hsia's first trial, in Los Angeles, in the spring of 1999, was the federal tax case, in which she was charged with filing false returns. The government alleged that Hsia had underpaid her taxes by about forty-five thousand dollars, an amount that, in normal circumstances, rarely gives rise to criminal charges. However, three prosecutors and several agents from the task force in Washington flew across the country to conduct the case. The proceedings ended on June 7th, with the jurors evenly split on some counts, and most favoring acquittal on others.

The end of the tax case left the most important allegation against Hsia outstanding: had she used the monastics and other straw contributors to launder illegal campaign contributions by the temple? This was a serious concern for the government. "You have this foreign-based entity pouring big money into one of our campaigns," the government investigator said. "That was the real problem here." The prosecutors' concerns were heightened because Hsia had solicited contributions at three other fund-raising events, in 1995 and 1996—two for the Clinton-Gore campaign, and one for Representative Patrick Kennedy, of Rhode Island—where the donors were reimbursed by the temple or by individual contributors who wanted to give beyond legal limits. (Hsia denies that she knew the temple was re-

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JIL SANDER

imbursing any contributors, and temple spokespeople have asserted that the monastics were reimbursed with money raised in America, not Taiwan.)

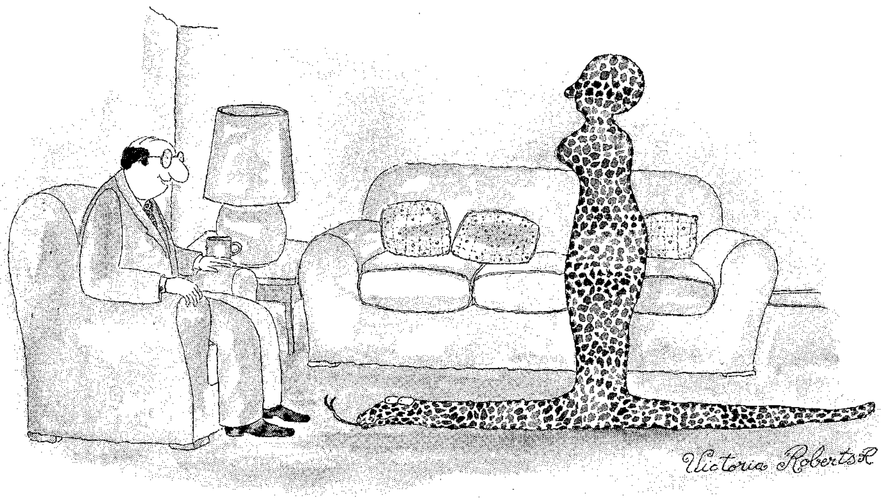
The prosecutors did not charge Hsia with violations of campaign-finance law, because, it seems, there was so little agreement on what the law provided. Rather, the government alleged that Hsia had caused false statements to be made to the government in connection with the fund-raising events. This was somewhat odd, because Hsia had never made any direct "statements" to the government; she had passed the monastics' checks to John Huang, and he, in turn, passed them on to the Democratic National Committee, whose treasurer reported them to the Federal Election Commission. According to the government's theory, Hsia had solicited contributions knowing that the donors would be reimbursed by the temple. Thus, she could be assumed to know that the D.N.C. would report the names of the "conduit" contributors, rather than the "actual" contributors, to the government.

This attenuated theory of causation has, at least in recent memory, never been applied to any other individual, and on September 10, 1998, Judge Paul Friedman, of the federal district court in Washington, threw out all the false-statement counts against Hsia. The case, Friedman wrote, was built on an "Alice-in-Wonderland-like maze of logical leaps and tangled inferences." For a brief moment, it appeared that Hsia's legal ordeal might be over.

The government, however, appealed Judge Friedman's ruling, and, on May 18, 1999, a three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals in Washington reinstated the case. The trial took place in Friedman's court during February of this year. There were few surprises. After all, the facts of the temple event remain largely undisputed: the monastics wrote the checks; they were reimbursed by the temple; Hsia passed the checks to Huang; and Huang passed them on to the Democratic National Committee. On March 2nd, Hsia was convicted on all counts; Friedman has put off sentencing until he can decide on post-trial motions.

Campaigning that day for the upcoming New York primary, Al Gore had little to say. "The jury has rendered its verdict," he told reporters. "It's a hard day for her. She has been a friend and a political supporter. But since this matter is still in the courts I am not going to comment on it further." Arguably, if Gore had said more about the Buddhist-temple event during the previous four years, he might have avoided some of the trauma for Hsia, and for himself. He might have said, for example, that he was not ashamed of his appearance at the temple, and that he was as proud to campaign among Buddhists as he was to seek the votes of Catholics, Jews, and Protestants. Instead, Gore offered a series of apologetic explanations, calling the event "community outreach," "finance-related," and "donor maintenance," before finally settling on "I made a mistake."

Hsia told me that she bears Gore no ill will. "He shouldn't feel embarrassed or ashamed of relating to the temple," she said. "He should feel very proud of himself. He has a vision of associating all the countries. I'm not surprised he chose a Jewish Vice-President. He should say, Look, this is no different from people visiting the black churches or any churches or a Jewish temple. There's nothing wrong. He didn't do anything wrong. All politicians are cowards. But they could be better cowards."



"Myrna, I've always loved you in animal prints."

The case remains inseparable from the politics of the day. During a hearing on June 21st, for example, Jeff Sessions, a Republican senator from Alabama, had a telling exchange with Robert Conrad, Jr., the current head of the Campaign Financing Task Force. Sessions, after establishing that Hsia had not been sentenced, said, "I would expect that you would pursue vigorously the sentencing phase of that case. Will you?"

"Yes, sir," said Conrad.

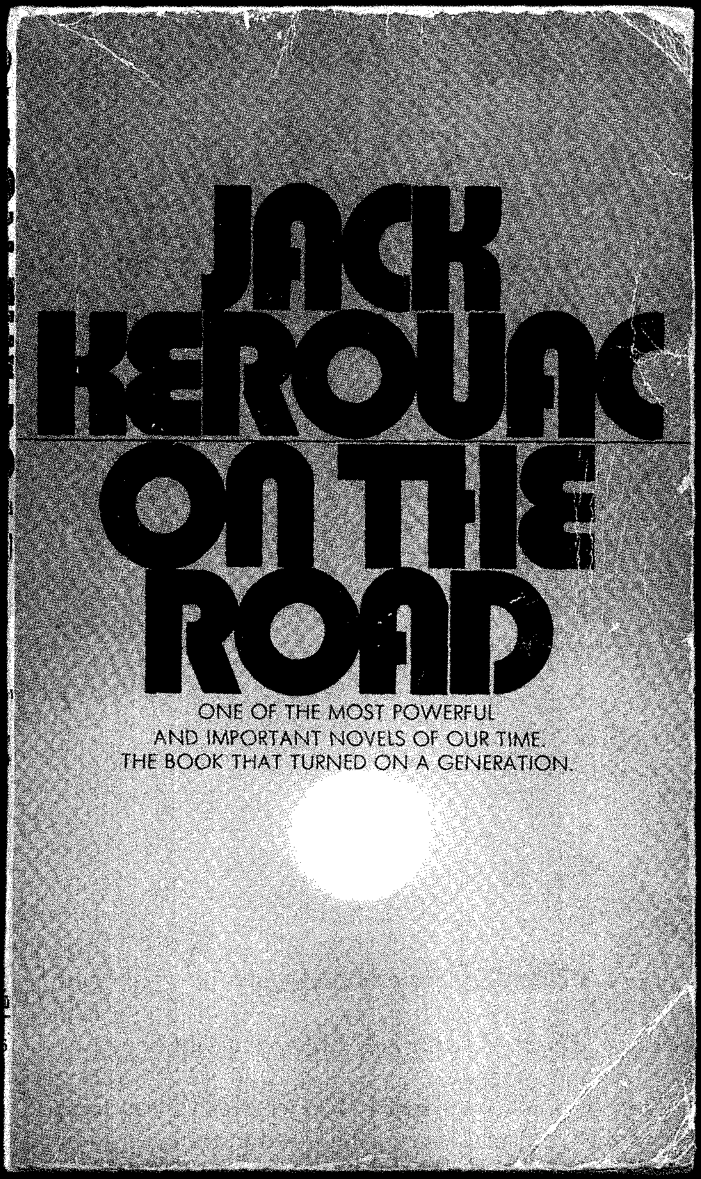
"I would expect that you would treat this like any other case, that unless the defendant was prepared to testify fully and completely, and provide information that you can verify, that you would not accept a recommendation of any downward departure."

Conrad assured the Senator that the task force would not seek any leniency for Hsia unless she provided "valuable" information.

The hearing marked a fitting overture to Maria Hsia's final step in the legal process: one of Gore's political opponents demanding, in effect, that Hsia receive a stiff sentence—she faces a maximum of twenty-five years in prison—unless she incriminates the Vice-President. Elected officials usually refrain from pressuring prosecutors in individual cases; prosecutors usually cut off inquiries like Sessions's from the start. But the colloquy between the Senator and the prosecutor provided a useful window into Hsia's case, which has been more about the drama of politics than about the requirements of law.

On the day that Gore arrived in town to accept his party's nomination, Hsia projected an equanimity that she may have lacked during her days as a go-getter. As we prepared to leave Starbucks, she said, as she had before, "I believe in cause and effect. I didn't do anything wrong. I'm at peace. If I did something not straight, I would go crazy. If I did something bad, it would drive me crazy. It's very Buddhism. My heart is free." ♦

June 22, 1972. Girlfriend forgets in bus somewhere near Kathmandu.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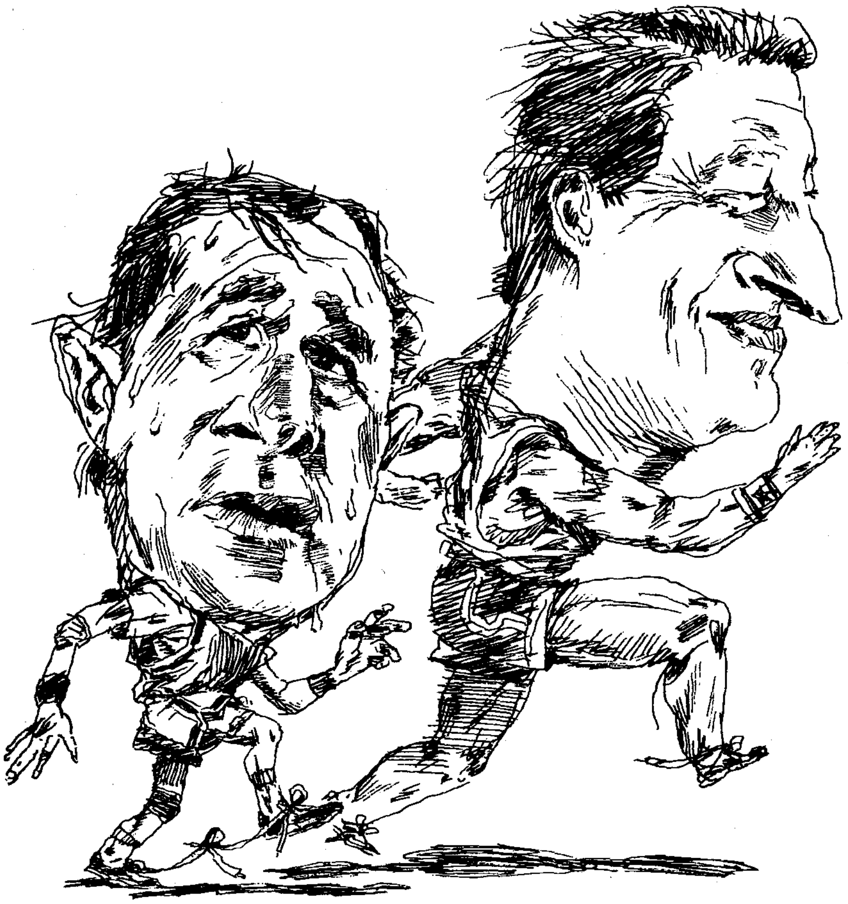
THE POLITICAL SCENE

CHANGING PLACES

Gore has fun. Bush has none.

BY JOE KLEIN



Oddly, this is the race Bush wanted: one where style is more important than substance.

JOHN CUNEO

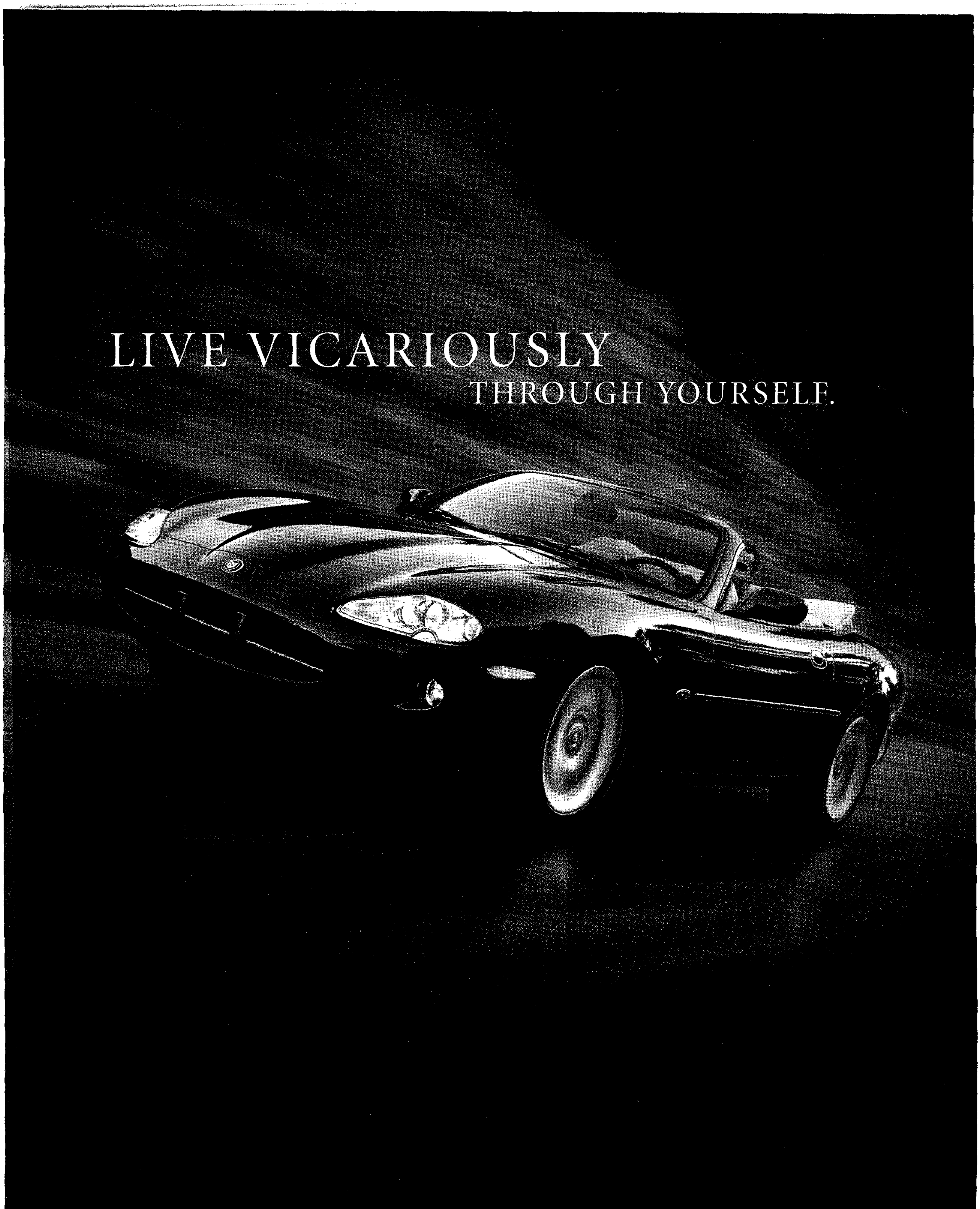
On Labor Day morning, as a strong wind pushed heavy clouds over the Chicago suburb of Naperville, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney bounded onto an outdoor stage and were greeted enthusiastically by a perfectly picturesque Midwestern crowd, which brandished American flags, campaign posters, and pompoms. There was a brass band playing, and balloons framed the stage. The candidates appeared to be performing their assigned roles in this benign diorama as well, smiling and waving and pointing to individuals in the crowd and nodding to each other, as if to say, "Isn't this great!"

What they *actually* were saying to each other is now well known, since the microphone was on. And, while some have criticized Bush for choosing that moment to spot a *Times* reporter named Adam Clymer in the crowd and refer to him as a "major-league asshole," and others have celebrated his right to do so, the import wasn't so much in the words themselves as in the combination of words and gestures. Bush appeared to be doing one thing (enjoying the crowd) while he was really doing the opposite (slagging a reporter). The moment, broadcast universally that night, was indelible. Not only did it confirm primordial American fears about the true nature of all politicians; it also demolished the message that George W. Bush hoped to be sending that day—that he was different, straight-talking, plain-spoken. "When we tell you something, we mean it!" he told the Naperville crowd.

The Bush "gaffe" punctuated what has become a mystifying turn in the Presidential race: the Governor of Texas seems to have lost his way. After a nimble spring and early summer, in which Bush worked hard to reëstablish his credentials as a more tolerable sort of Republican—less harsh in his rhetoric and less extreme in his policies than the Gingrich revolutionaries—he was suddenly supplanted on center stage by Al Gore, who made a brilliant Vice-Presidential selection and then managed not to appear a robotic dolt while giving his acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention (thus exceeding almost everyone's expectations). After a week or two out of the spotlight, Bush emerged, in late August, as if from a cave—blinded by the light, stumbling, and defensive. Last week, he slipped behind Gore in some polls, and joked, "I may go more Alpha male down the stretch."

Labor Day is a lesser ritual in the Presidential process, but a ceremony to be carefully observed nonetheless: the media throng gathers and lingers for a few days, casting judgment; there is more news about the candidates on the air, and so the public is induced to take another peek. Al Gore chose to bounce about the country in a twenty-seven-hour workathon, visiting people on the job in five different cities—a hokey idea, but surprisingly effective, as so many of his recent activities have been. Reporters were given baseball caps from the "Survivor" television show and T-shirts to commemorate the marathon. These bribes had their effect: there was the sense that Gore, along with his running mate, Joseph Lieberman, was embarked on something adventurous—a word seldom associated with him.

By contrast, Bush's Labor Day performance was dead lame. He made only two appearances, and both were brief. There was the Clymer moment and then, later, a visit to a peach festival in Michigan. His speeches were short and uninteresting; indeed, they managed—in a mere fifteen minutes each—to seem both obscure and defensive. The obscure part was, remarkably, Bush's main message for the day: an attempt to transform the usual bickering over the ground rules for the Presidential debates into a cosmic commentary about Al Gore's character. Bush argued that Gore was reneging on his promise to debate—that he couldn't be trusted—but the details of the case were tactical and



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foolish: no one actually believes that Gore, a carnivore at the lectern, doesn't want to debate. Indeed, the inanity of Bush's quibble raised a larger question: Given the Labor Day opportunity, didn't he have anything better to talk about?

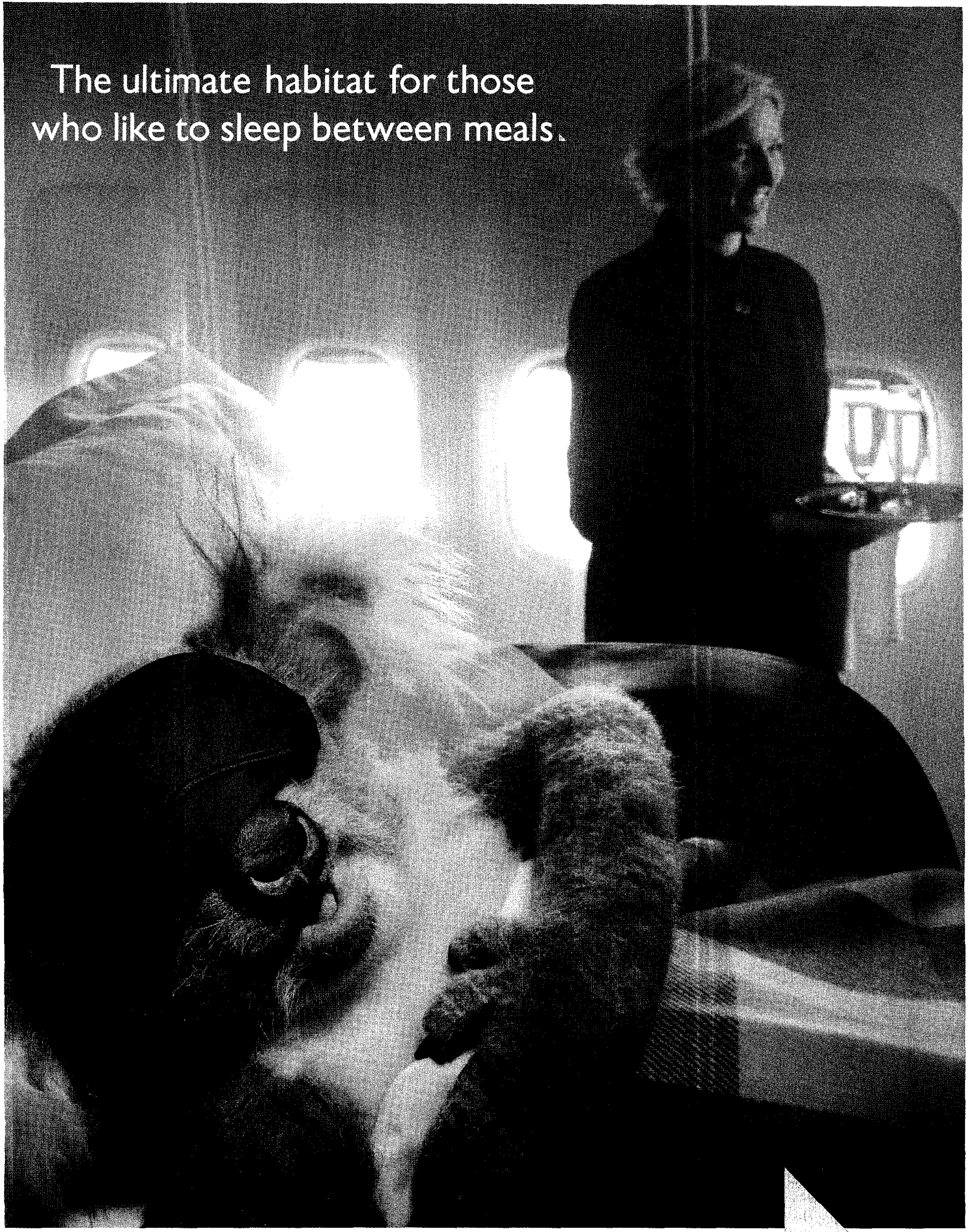
That appears to be something of a problem. After Gore's August emergence, Bush's "good" issues—education, Social Security reform, military preparedness—have seemed less compelling than his not-so-good issues, like the $1.3-trillion tax cut he had promised early in the campaign (in order to thwart the ridiculous taxophobe Steve Forbes). Bush spent the last week in August stumbling over billions and trillions, in a desperate effort to explain his unwanted beneficence. And now, on Labor Day, he unveiled a defensive and slightly patronizing new pitch. He pulled four dollars from his pocket, representing the projected surplus over the next ten years. Two (trillion) would go to Social Security. One (trillion) would go to new programs, like military spending and a prescription-drug benefit for senior citizens. And one—here Bush actually gave a dollar to an unsuspecting citizen—would go back to the public, in the form of tax cuts. Bush can get quite exercised when making this point, and with good reason: it remains the chief philosophical difference between Democrats and Republicans. The problem is that most people aren't entirely sure that the surplus exists (and it may not, if the economy falters). They are therefore reluctant to take money that may prove nonexistent, especially in a time of prosperity. By contrast, Gore's announcement last week that he would set aside a three-hundred-billion-dollar "rainy day" fund to get us through bad times sounds reassuring.

The next day, Bush did better. He gave a detailed, and praiseworthy, speech in Allentown, Pennsylvania, about Medicare reform. Speaking quietly, and without tripping over his words, he acknowledged that his party had been wrong in opposing Medicare, and he took a stand that was arguably more responsible than Al Gore's unwavering support for the current system, which shovels vast amounts of unneeded government support to a relatively affluent elderly population. (Bush agrees with the bipartisan Breaux-Frist commission's recommendations for controlled health-insurance competition, a system favored by most "new" Democrats.) But this was a defensive act, too: Gore had been hammering Bush for not having a position on a prescription-drug benefit. Now he has one, but the issue is sufficiently complicated that no one will ever understand the differences between the candidates, which, indeed, seems the fate of most issues in the coming campaign: with only a few exceptions, like Bush's unfortunate tax cut, they are either too complicated or too peripheral to matter very much.

In fact, this is the race that Bush was hoping for: one where style is more important than substance. The Republican campaign has been built on the assumption that Al Gore was too aggressive and partisan—too charmless, too blatantly marketed—to be tolerated in a quiet time. The assumption seemed plausible, and it may still work to Bush's advantage, especially in the debates, but Gore will have to coöperate.

Gore's transformation is, in a way, more surprising than Bush's. The selection of Lieberman had a lot to do with it—it seemed to change the metabolism of the Vice-President's campaign. Ever since, Gore has been moving faster. He dashed through his acceptance speech, which was the best thing about it. He dashes along rope lines, slapping hands; dashes to the podium for a speech. Almost every day, there are pictures of Gore running somewhere. (Bush's selection of Dick Cheney—an ancient vizier whose lugubrious presence only reinforces his partner's juniority—seems to have had the opposite effect.)

After two days of dragging along with Bush and Cheney, I found Joe Lieberman at the Harley-Davidson motorcycle factory in Kansas City. He was still tired after the Labor Day marathon, but there was an exhilarating freshness to the spectacle of a pale, slight man from Connecticut, who looks more like an orthodontist than like a potential President, moving along the assembly line surrounded by hulking, tattooed, ponytailed Harley workers, many of whom seemed refugees from a recent bar fight. "I must say," Lieberman told them, radiating a joy so pure that it could not be feigned, "this group has the strongest handshakes that I've met anywhere in America." ♦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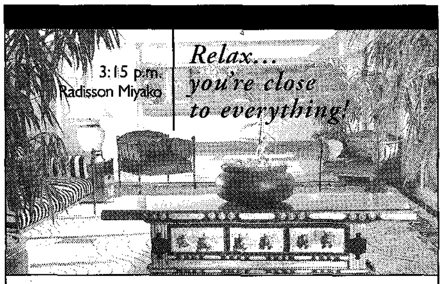

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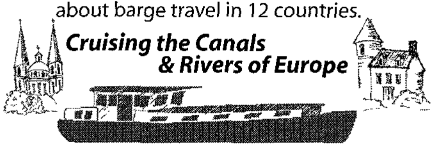

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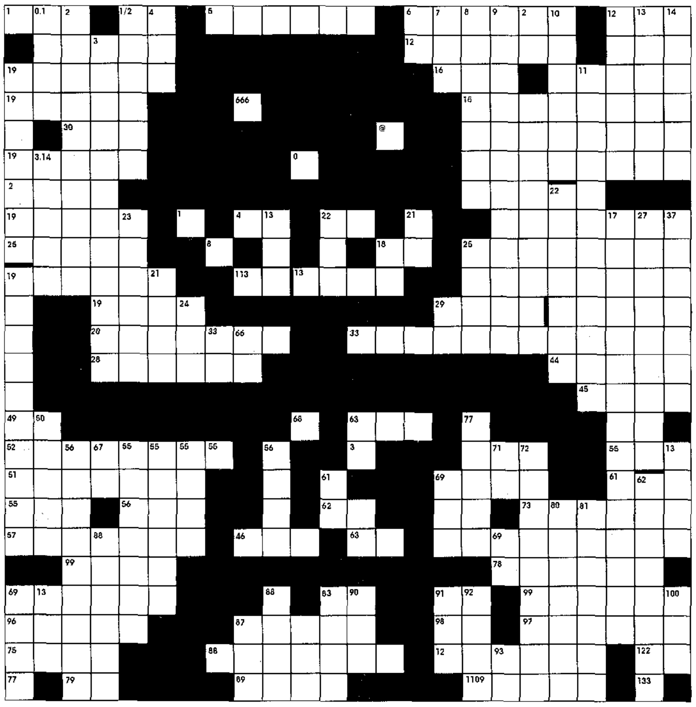

Across

1 This never happened.
5 Schrödinger's dog.
10 Half of zero.
15 A stitch in _______ saves *eight*.
19 Discredited alchemist.
23 Book: The _______.
25 Nonsense word.
27 She was never President.
28 Overhyped dot-com.
30 Chevy Chase flop.
32 Ugliest fruit.
34 Woody flick set in N.Y.C.
37 Lincoln: "I love _______."
40 Bald N.B.A.er.
41 Obsolete computer language.
46 Better not write this one in ink.
47 Bee's remorse.
48 Earhart's grave.
55 Opposite of red.
56 Not "gnu."
58 Famously foulmouthed Canadian.
59 Gandhi punched him.

Down

1 Underpriced N.Y.C. neighborhood.
2 *Real* Captain of Pequod.
3 Famous first words.
4 Frost poem about "bumpin' uglies."
5 He died in Second World War.
7 TV's crime-fighting slug.
8 John _______.
9 Common crossword mistake.
12 Tarnished child star.
13 Patron saint of zombies.
14 Yoko (not "Ono").
15 Feed a cold, starve a fever, _______ hookworm.
16 It's immune to gravity.
17 The aunt of invention.
18 Harpo quote.
24 Sixteenth sense.
26 Slept with Warren Beatty.
32 "Sayonara" in dolphin.
34 Sec. of State, 1836-42, dog.
35 2 + 2 DOESN'T equal . . .
36 Military acronym.
41 What happens after you die.
43 "The next Beatles."
51 Jesus Christ's daughter.
54 Long-running anarchist sitcom. ♦

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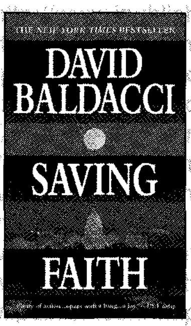
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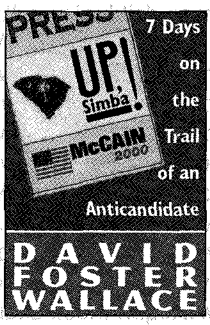
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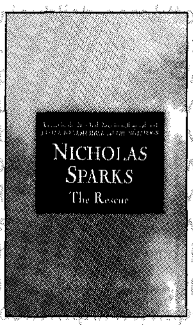
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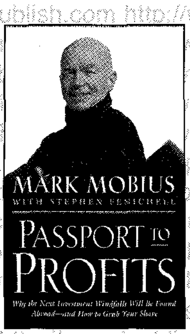
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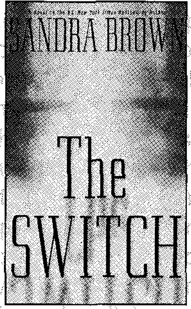
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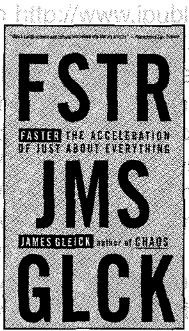
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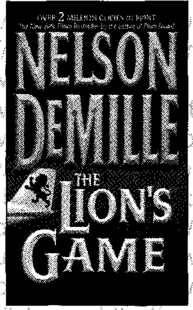
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LETTER FROM SYDNEY

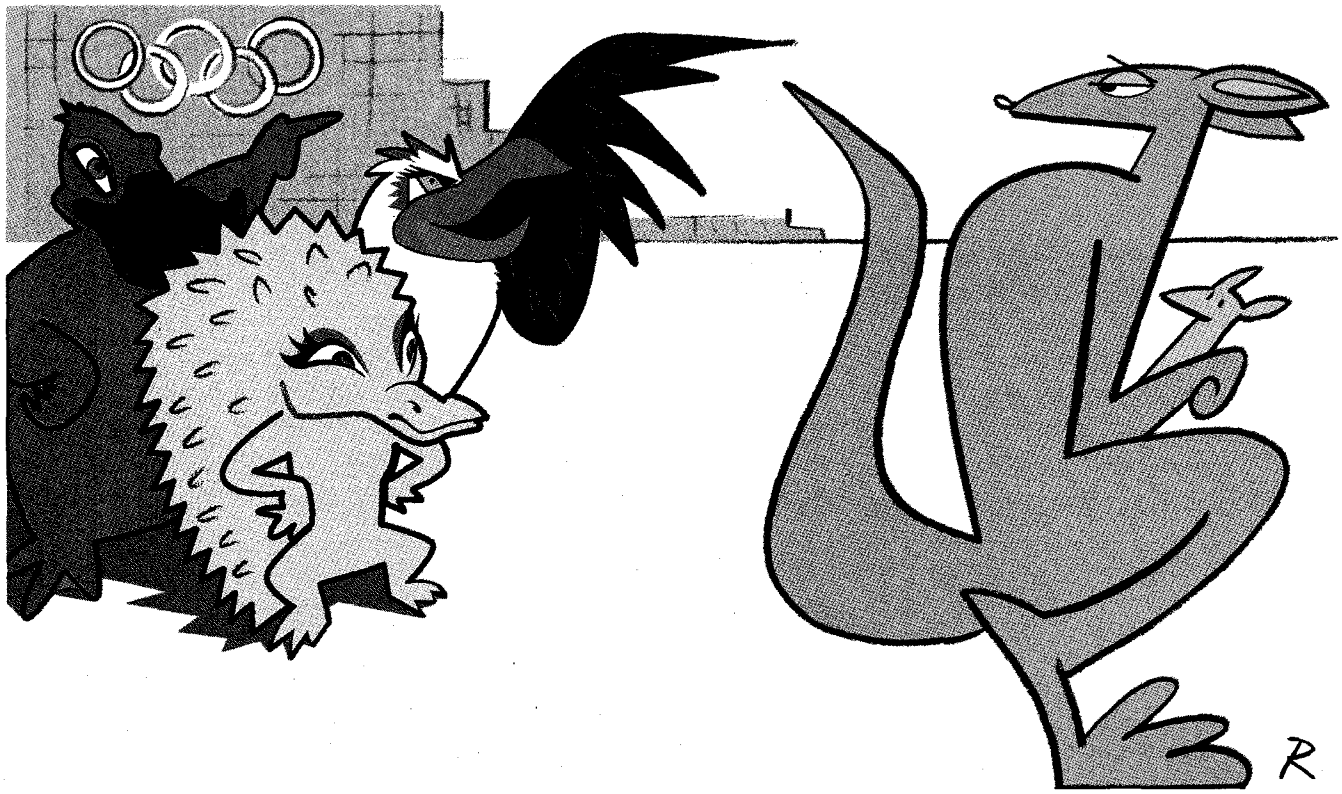
GAME PLAN

Australians go for the gold in Olympics bashing.

BY SUSAN ORLEAN

Millie, a spiny anteater with Betty Boop eyes, is the homeliest of the Olympic mascots and also the least athletic. I went to see a real Millie the other day at Sydney's Taronga Zoo and waited an hour for it to exert itself—to run or walk or do rhythmic gymnastics or even to lap up an army of ants with its tongue, which is what spiny anteaters do best, even though ant lapping is not yet a recognized Olympic sport—but this Millie wasn't moving. The Summer Olympics were only a few weeks away, but it was still sharply cold in Sydney, and most of the animals at the zoo had their noses tucked under their tails and their backs to the snappy wind. Even in the finest weather, though, spiny anteaters (or echidnas, as they are properly known), are clumsy-looking mammals the size of bowling balls, who toddle around like little drunks and roll up, spines bristling, when they get upset. They are not what you would call "sporty." The other two official Olympic mascots, Syd the platypus and Olly the kookaburra, are much more athletic than Millie but just as peculiar. Kookaburras are small, husky kingfishers that laugh hysterically at absolutely anything. Platypuses, with their big beaks, furry bodies, flat tails, and webbed feet, look like what mothers always warn you will happen if you buy separates rather than a nice outfit. However un-Olympian Millie, Syd, and Olly may be, they are plastered all over Sydney in what has been described as the biggest Olympics marketing effort in history; you cannot walk down a Sydney street without encountering an Olly stationery set, a Syd bumbag, a Millie sun visor, or a sheet of stickers showing Olly playing basketball, Syd swinging a bat, and Millie—sluggish, nearly immobile Millie—gaily tapping a Ping-Pong ball. "I'm a typical Australian," Millie says, in a children's book explaining her Olympic career move. "I'm tough, clever and occasionally a bit spiky. I'm an expert at my chosen occupation, namely digging, and I really like my food."

Everyone I met in Australia seemed awfully cranky about the Olympics. Maybe sour moods are typical in cities about to host events that are expensive and complicated and guaranteed to tangle traffic for weeks, but Australians seem to have brought cynicism to record-breaking new heights. One of the few things anyone raved about to me was the fact that Air New Zealand was offering a special, all-time-low round-trip airfare out of Australia during the two weeks of the Games. Another was an acidly satirical television series called "The Games," about the machinations of the local Olympic committee. Otherwise, attitudes seemed to span the range from indifference to despair. This summer, a new Web site, www.silly2000.com, was launched to further skewer Sydney 2000; its motto is "Keeping You Sane Through the Games," and the site includes a count-



Syd the platypus, Millie the spiny anteater, and Olly the kookaburra: you can't go anywhere without meeting the Olympic mascots.

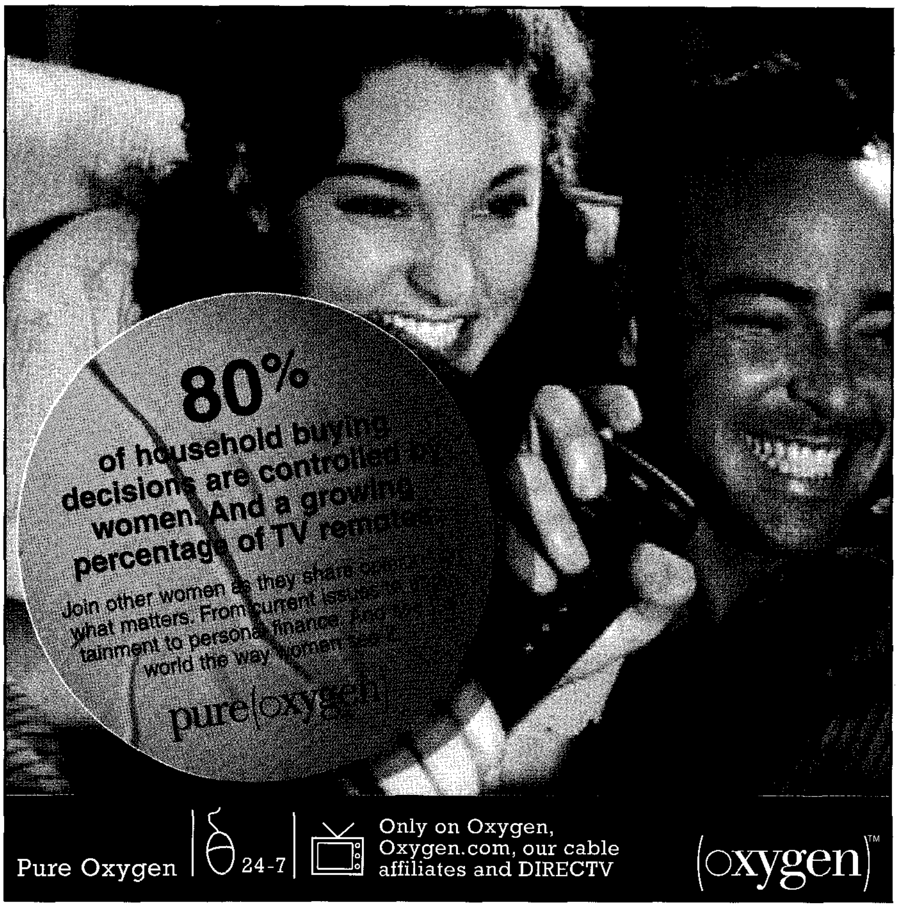
down to the end of the Olympics and mock stories on equestrian hooliganism and where to buy guns and fast food in Sydney.

I had arrived in Australia expecting—dreading, actually—Olympic delirium, since Australians are usually portrayed as unironic enthusiasts. Once I got over my surprise at their cynicism, though, it struck me as perfectly appropriate; this is, after all, a post-Salt-Lake-City-scandals Olympics. What was going around was a distaste for the local Olympic Committee, antipathy toward the corporate nature of the Games, annoyance at the logistics of the thing, and a bit of anticipatory defensiveness about whether Sydney can actually pull it off. "We're probably going to be reading a lot of nasty stories about Sydney now," a talk-show host said to me, sighing heavily. Nasty stories about Sydney, one of the most beautiful, pleasant cities on the planet? "Ha-ha," I answered, assuming he was kidding. He sighed again and said, "Well, I guess we have it coming." (There have, it seems, been goof-ups. The Sydney medals, for example, appear to depict the Colosseum in Rome rather than the Parthenon in Greece, the birthplace of the Games. "The Australians," sniffed *Avriani*, a Greek daily, "have confused a sports arena with a public execution arena.") Even children in Australia are being inoculated against Olympic fever. I figured that Kokey Koala, the main character in "Kokey Koala and the Bush Olympics," would embody heroics and prowess, until I turned the book over and read, "Watch Kokey's disasters as he participates in the Bush Olympics."

The general grumpiness about the event meant that it was still possible, four weeks before the opening ceremonies, to get tickets to just about anything you wanted—that is, unless Australian postal workers went on strike, as they were threatening to do, and refused to deliver any Olympic tickets unless they got a special bonus. (Sydney hotel workers, keeping pace with the post office, staged a walkout for an Olympic bonus as well.) "We were glad when we got it, so let's get into it!" one radio campaign scolded.

My first night in Sydney, I flipped on the television and saw a commercial

ROBERT RISKO



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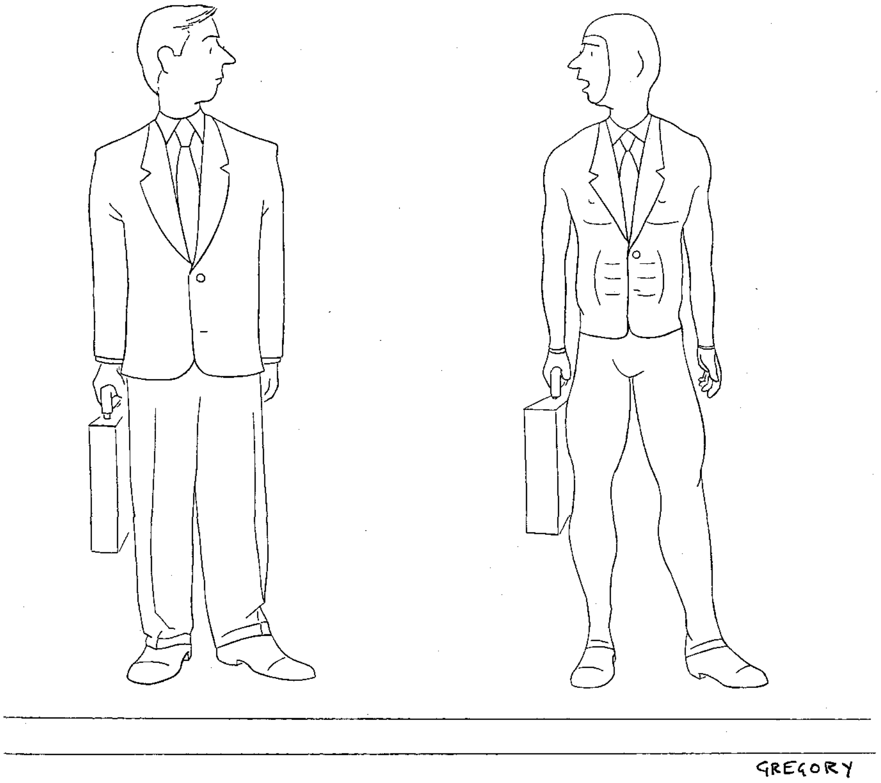

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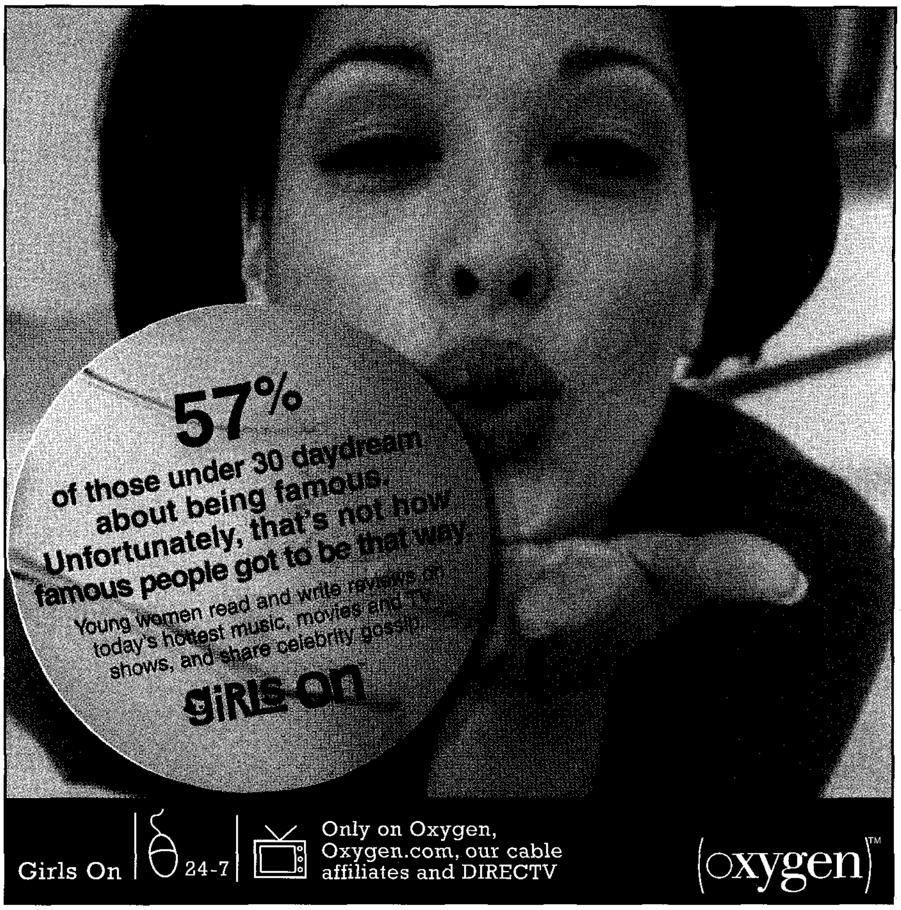
that showed an elderly man sitting in a stark white room, mournfully talking into the camera. At first, I thought it was one of those public-service ads urging you to wear seat belts or quit smoking, because the man looked so depressed. "No, I didn't go to the Olympics in '56," he was saying, referring to the last time Australia hosted the Games, in Melbourne. And, he went on, his life had been a welter of regret ever since. "Rarely do you get a second chance in a lifetime," he said. "Why would you pass up that opportunity?" Which of course meant, "You will never, ever outlive the remorse and sorrow that I guarantee you if you don't at least go to a water-polo match or something." Maybe the ads will work eventually, but, for the moment, the Sydney *Morning Herald's* "Holiday Accommodation" classified section still listed apartments far from Sydney, under the headline "Escape the Olympics!"

When it comes to Olympians rather than Olympics, everyone cheers up. There were billboards all over town featuring Cathy Freeman, the Aborigine runner who won a silver medal in Atlanta, and daily reports on Ian Thorpe, the seventeen-year-old swimmer, nicknamed Thorpedo, whose stupendous foot size is a matter of national pride. As cool as they are about the Olympics, Australians are mad about sports. They surf and swim and golf and ride and sail, and they play tennis and cricket and soccer, and they totally worship "footy"—Australian Rules football, a rugbylike concoction derived from an Aborigine game called *marngrook*. "Sport is a prime metaphor for Australian life," the art critic and historian Robert Hughes writes in the Sydney Games official souvenir program—which is called, inventively enough, "Official Souvenir Program"—"and because of it, many of our heroes (we don't have a lot) are sportsmen and women." In fact, six of the ferries to the Olympic venue in Homebush are named in honor of Australian Olympic athletes. Another hero might have been Richard Kevan Gosper, a working-class Sydneysider who won first place in the 440-yard sprint, in the 1954 Commonwealth Games; a silver medal in track, at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics; and a place on the Australian team in the 1960 Olympics, in Rome. Might have been, that is, if Gosper—now the most senior Australian Olympic official—hadn't queered his reputation by taking an eighteen-thousand-dollar ski vacation in Salt Lake City, in 1993, a potential violation of International Olympic Committee rules. (He was finally cleared of any wrongdoing after five months of investigation.) Then, to forever insure his lack of popularity in Australia, he allowed his daughter Sophie to accept an invitation to be the first Australian in the torch relay, bumping a young girl who had originally been chosen for the spot. Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* suggested that Gosper's name was actually an acronym for Greedy Obstinate Selfish Pompous Egotistical Reptile.

Except for the Sophie Gosper incident, the torch relay has been one of the happiest parts of the proceedings. As the torch has been circling the country, newspapers have been publishing maps showing its route, along with lists of the names of the various runners, most of whom are ordinary blokes, minor athletic heroes, community standouts, and kids. But even the relay has had snarls. Some joker tried to douse the torch with a fire extinguisher, and smart-alecks have been lighting cigarettes from it. One town, Tingha, was so offended by being bypassed that its citizens conspired to pinch some of the flame with a homemade torch. Another town, Nimbin, in northern New South Wales, felt that it was deliberately left off the route because of its notoriety as a marijuana center and the fear that there would be too much enthusiasm for lighting joints from the Olympic torch. The manager of a local backpackers' hotel was quoted as saying, "The hemp Olympics come here, not the flame ones."

On my last day in Sydney, I went to Olympic Park, in Homebush Bay, about fifteen miles west of the center of the city. From downtown, the easiest way to Homebush is by RiverCat, a long ferryboat that slips noiselessly from Circular Quay, beside the white half-shell of the Sydney Opera House, down the Parramatta River to Gladesville and Chiswick and Darling Harbour and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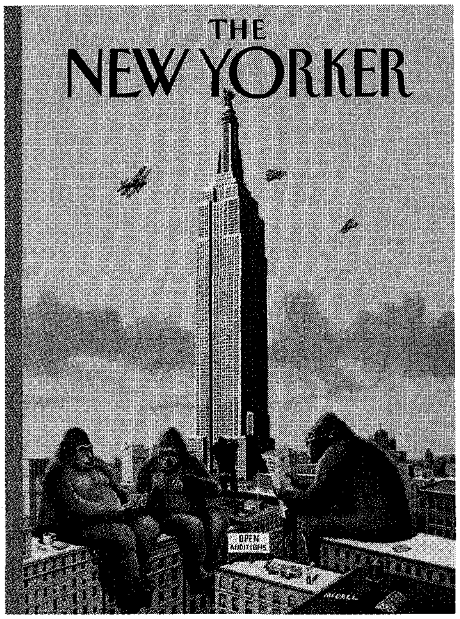

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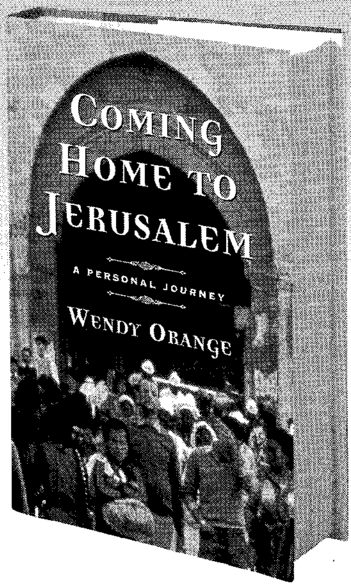

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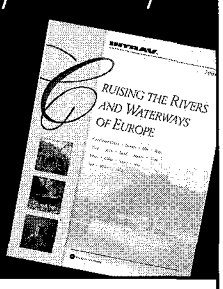

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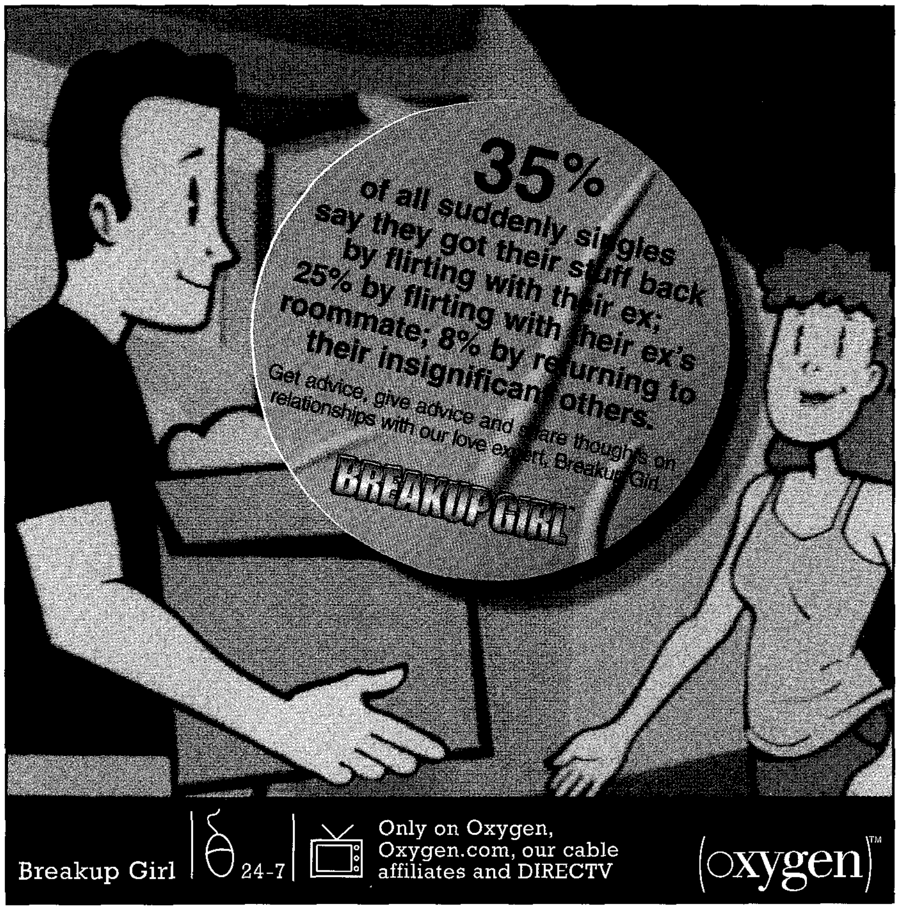
Kissing Point and, eventually, to Homebush. The banks of the river are ragged, with long grooves and deep coves and jigsawed inlets and bays. Homebush is on a chunk of low, flat land shaped like the head of a golden retriever. The area has had an inglorious past. Besides being the site of a former racetrack, Homebush consisted of a drab collection of suburban bungalows, brick factories, and railroad tracks. For forty years, Homebush Bay and the surrounding wetlands were used as a dump for domestic garbage, construction debris, and commercial waste, including petroleum, tar sludge, asbestos, heavy metals, and dioxins. So much waste was deposited that the landscape was permanently redrawn. The area was considered, in the most generous terms, "highly degraded." After six years and a hundred and thirty-seven million dollars, it is now a green, or at least greenish, mostly man-made landscape called Millennium Parklands, replanted with native grasses and casuarina trees, and pocked with twenty-two man-made ponds. Even the most ornery of Australians would have to agree that this aspect of hosting the Olympics has been a success.

Most of the thirty-two Sydney Olympic venues are clustered at Millennium Parklands, including the two-hundred-million-dollar SuperDome, the Aquatic Centre, the Olympic Stadium, the Tennis Centre, the Baseball Stadium, Archery Park, and McDonald's Central. The Olympic site is such a spectacle that it has been swarmed by visitors who wanted to see the largest Olympic stadium in history (StadiumAustralia, which seats a hundred and ten thousand). By the time I got to Sydney, some of the athletes had arrived, and the site was in pre-Games security lockdown. Though it was no longer possible to tour the facilities, my Olympic Explorer bus, which met the ferry, was nearly full; the passengers were mostly Italian and Japanese.

The bus driver was a middle-aged Australian with a craggy face and a bush hat covered with pins and insignia. Even he had succumbed to the prevailing cynicism. "We'll get the propaganda over with first," he announced, and proceeded to give the precooked description of the place. The passengers pushed toward the windows to take pictures of Olympic Boulevard, and Pavilions 2, 3, and 4, and Boral Olympic Dream Parkway, and Kronos Hill—a garbage mountain now capped and replanted and hemmed in with retaining walls. Everything was bright and clean and beautiful, and had the unnaturally gentle undulations of a landfill. As we passed the Homebush Bay Novotel, the bus driver said it was a fine hotel offering every comfort. "The only thing you won't see at the Novotel are Olympic officials," he said. "That's because it's only a four-star hotel. Olympic officials are only willing to stay at five-star hotels." The passengers tittered and put their cameras down. The bus driver chuckled and added, "They couldn't handle a four-star hotel, poor dears."

Some of the Olympic venues are outside Millennium Parklands. The equestrian events, for instance, will take place west of downtown at something called, remarkably enough, Horsley Park. Beach volleyball will be held at Bondi Beach, a choice that many Australians have found remarkable for other reasons. Bondi is not the prettiest beach in Australia, but it's probably the best loved—as familiar and iconic to Sydney residents as, say, Central Park is to New Yorkers. One of the closest beaches to downtown, it is a horseshoe of tan sand southeast of the harbor, in a hilly neighborhood of kabob shops and stores selling spotty-dog ice cream and Roxy bikinis and deep-fried coconut-battered Mars bars. Bondi has one of the oldest life-saving clubs in Australia and one of the oldest surf cultures. Board shorts and rash-guard shirts with "Bondi Beach" insignia sell like crazy, and most tourists to Sydney ride three stops on the Illawarra Line subway to look at the legendary waves.

There is no ballplaying allowed at Bondi Beach. When it was announced, two years ago, that the Olympic beach-volleyball competition would take place at Bondi, and that a stadium would be built to accommodate it, reaction in the neighborhood was immediate. A Stop the Stadium movement was launched, led by a group called Bondi Olympic Watch, which collected thousands of signatures on petitions opposing the stadium. Nevertheless, the stadium went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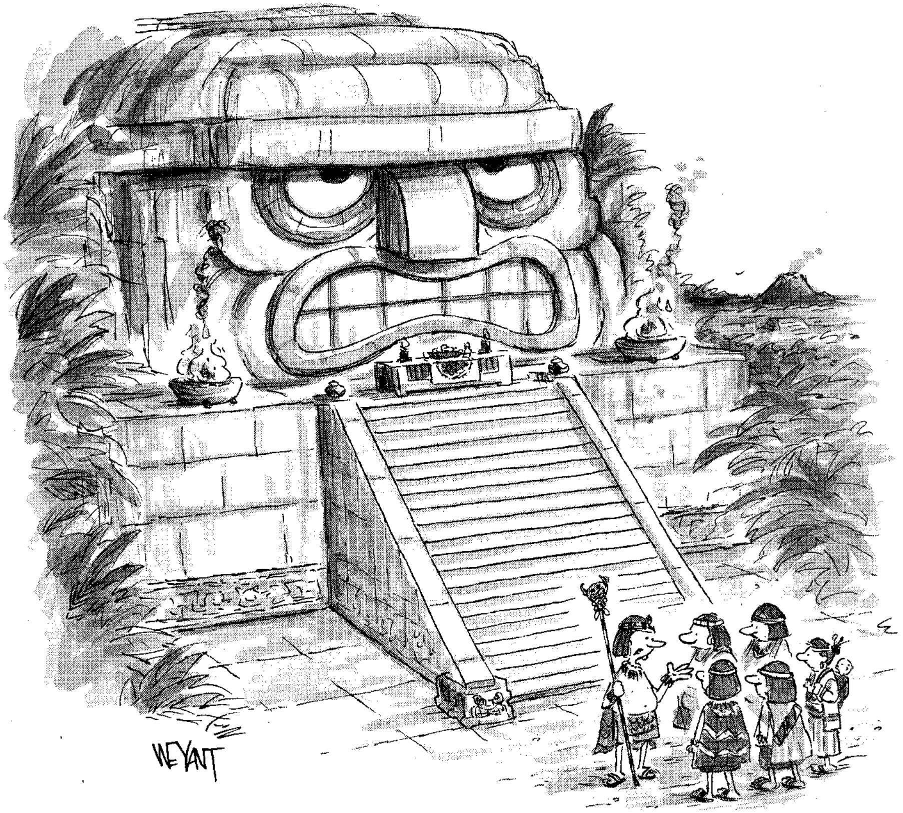
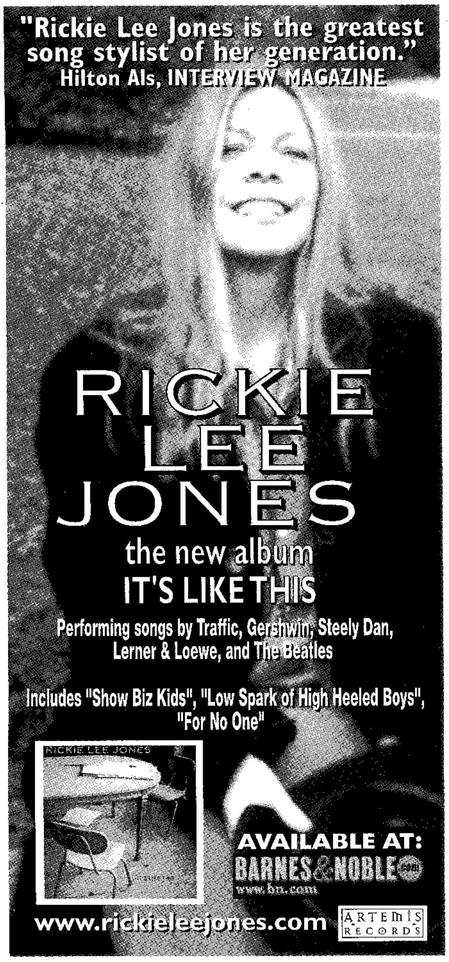
up. The anti-beach-volleyball groups kept complaining. "Bondi Olympic Stadium Turns Into a Dollar Dumper," one flyer raged. "The Olympic beach volleyball stadium has turned the centre of our world famous beach into what looks like a giant scaffold site and is gobbling up millions of tax payers' dollars. Originally costed at $13 million, this piece of ugliness has become the unspoken nightmare of the Olympic Coordination Authority."

The stadium is a gigantic tangle of risers and bleachers and fencing moored on some three hundred pylons sunk into the sand. Supposedly, it will be pulled down as soon as the Olympics are over, and Bondi Beach will be back to normal, but many people I spoke to suspect that they'll be stuck with it forever, and others referred to a study alleging that if the pylons are removed, they will raise polluted soil to the beach surface. I spent my afternoon at Bondi walking around the stadium, reading the "Fuck the Olympics" graffiti and peeking through the fence to get a look. Anyone who really wants to see the inside will have no trouble once the Games begin, because at last count tens of thousands of beach-volleyball tickets remained unsold. In Martin Smith's Bookshop, just off Campbell Parade, I picked up a sticker that said, "Keep Taking Your Medication. Our Olympic Visitors Must Suspect Nothing," and considered buying a T-shirt with a mock I.O.C. logo that said "Idiots Organizing Chaos" rather than "International Olympic Committee" and had five lemons arranged like the five Olympic rings.

"There's a lot of bad odor about the Olympics," Martin Smith told me. "I'm just disillusioned. I'd like to not be here at all. Instead, I'm leaving for Spain halfway through." A customer, overhearing him, came over and said angrily, "Not all of us feel that way. I live here, too, and I'm very proud to share the beach with the world for a few weeks." I was surprised that the store owners in the area weren't more enthusiastic, since the event will probably bring thousands of visitors who might shop around. "People who come for an event like that don't go shopping," Lee Ross, the owner of Parade Music, explained. "They come for the event and they leave. It's a myth



"He said it will be hot and muggy early in the week, with a slight chance of showers."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that it will be good for the stores. It won't help my business to have a bunch of idiots in G-strings lobbing around."

I thought that the most outrageous thing about the Sydney Olympics would be its colossal merchandising campaign—a projected billion dollars' worth, the biggest in Olympic history, protected by a revolutionary anti-counterfeiting device patterned on DNA taken from the hair of an unnamed Olympic athlete. But that was trumped by the announcement, made a few days before I left Australia, that a float featuring a dozen or so drag queens would appear in the closing ceremonies. According to published reports, Mitzi Macintosh, Portia Turbo, Chelsea Bun, Trudi Valentine, and Vanessa Wagner—a few of Sydney's most glamorous transvestites—will "frock up in *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* outfits" as part of a celebration of Australian culture. One newspaper reported that "bitchy comments about who will have the most expensive costume and how some allegedly unreliable drag queens have missed out are also flying about. . . . But there are hopes that a group of 'muscle marys'—or well-toned men—may perform alongside them."

Suddenly, the public debate left the question of whether Cathy Freeman should be allowed to carry an Aboriginal flag and whether members of Parliament were right to accept expensive tickets from corporate sponsors, and picked up the drag-queen controversy. The letters columns of Sydney's newspapers were swamped: "The billions watching the ceremony on worldwide TV will no doubt be left with the enduring memory, not of our champion athletes, but of abnormal men prancing round in atrocious feathers and frocks." "Sydney, the City of Sleaze. Well, it does have a certain alliterative quality." "After observing the tasteless self-serving arrogance of the ruling AOC/IOC aristocracy, I conclude that even a bunch of drag queens would, by comparison, provide a classier act." "That boofy bronzed [Australian] macho sort of thing is fearfully passé. Although, to tell the aa-bsolute truth, there are some people I know who wouldn't mind a boofy bronzed [Australian], if only they could lay their hands on one. What bliss!"

The drag queens had signed confidentiality agreements, so they weren't talking, but as I left Australia the people of Sydney definitely were, and I suspect the debate over the opening ceremonies, the closing ceremonies, the mascots, the venues, the disfiguring of Bondi Beach, the ticket prices, the ticket delivery, the traffic, the price hikes, and, of course, the judging of the events, will continue until the torch is passed. Certainly, that debate is already a little more trenchant and a little more cantankerous than I had anticipated. My favorite souvenir—besides my Millie the Spiny Anteater stickers—was a letter addressing the drag-queen issue with what I had come to understand was classic Australian reasoning. "Transvestites and poofters at the Olympic Games to illustrate the Australian sporting culture?" the writer asked. "Why not add a few prostitutes to give their sport some quality?" ♦

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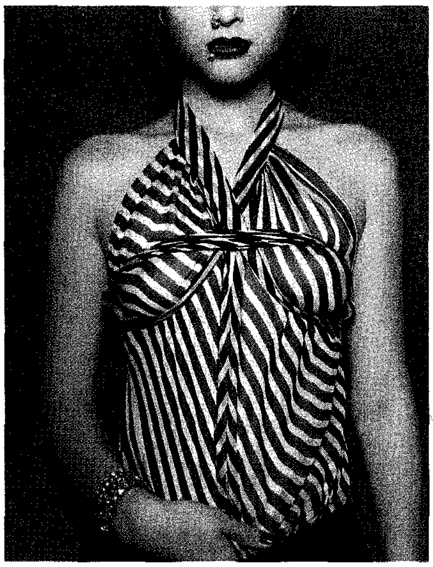
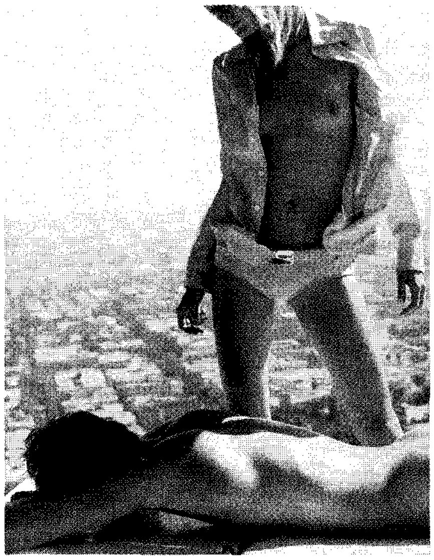
ANNALS OF APPEARANCES

HOT FLASHES

Why Mario Testino is the photographer of the moment.

BY IAN PARKER

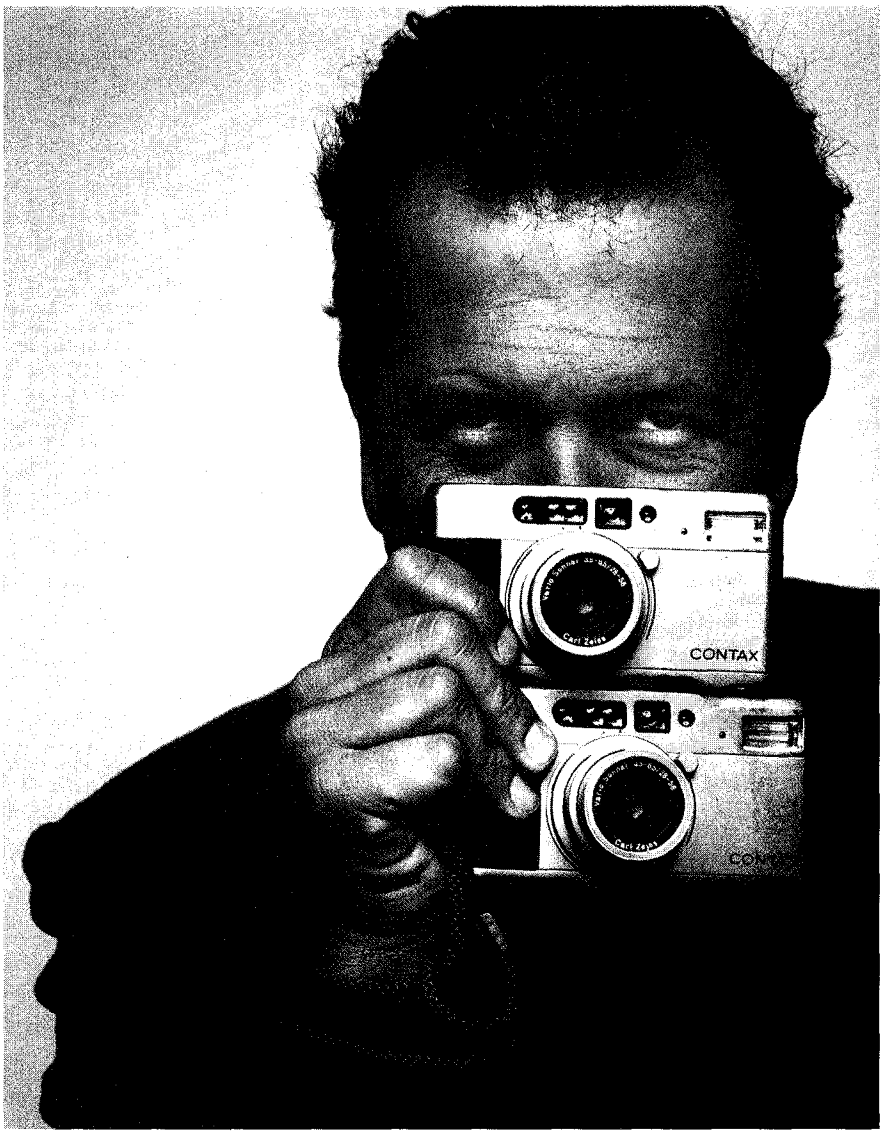




Mario Testino, the Peruvian fashion photographer, finds many things incredible and many other things amazing (“*A! May! Zing!*”). But mostly he *loves* things, and he loves them with a long, open “o”: he *lorves* them. At different times in recent weeks, Testino told me how much he loves Rio de Janeiro, Los Angeles, Naples, “the horizontal position,” algebra, Latin pop music, navy-blue short-sleeved shirts, Gisele Bündchen, Kate Moss, fashion, fashion photography, fashion shows, glamour, beauty, parties, ideas, life, people, and onions. Recently, Testino ordered a hamburger with extra onions, pronouncing the word *ornions*. “Please,” he said. “Onions. Like five portions of onions. So many onions. Onions, onions, onions.”

The first time I saw Testino take a photograph, I began to see how this boundless eagerness might serve a strategic purpose, and might be linked to the pressing need for Testino felt in the fashion-and-celebrity business. He was at a party that was being held around a large swimming pool at a hotel in Monte Carlo, where Italian *Vogue* was celebrating the eightieth birthday of Helmut Newton. Boy George was the d.j., and at one point the designers John Galliano and Alexander McQueen—apparently disappointed that real life does not have the exact texture of a fashion photograph—dived into the swimming pool fully dressed, and broke the surface shrieking and gasping for cameras. Meanwhile, Testino, who was wearing a navy suit and a black shirt, moved through the crowd with his shoulders back and his palms flapping upward, as if idly tossing a beanbag from hand to hand. He is forty-five years old, tall and tanned, and with his big, bright teeth he bears a vague resemblance to Garry Shandling. He was carrying two little Contax cameras, one attached to each wrist, and as the party warmed up he began to dance and photograph at the same time—raising each camera in turn, with his elbows pushed out, as if doing a nineteen-fifties miming dance that never took off. “Work it!” he cried. “Work it! Work it! Work it!”

Indoors, in an atmosphere of high seriousness, the designer Karl Lagerfeld was playing the role of the evening's official portraitist. A makeshift studio had been set up, and celebrity guests were posing under hot lights. Lagerfeld, heavy and regal, sat behind his camera, fanning himself. Outside, Testino was grinning and snapping. He danced up to the photographer David Bailey, who was sitting with his wife by the pool, and who looked as if he had not smiled in a hundred years. He is probably not Testino's greatest admirer. ("His work," he said to me later, watching his words, "is kind of fresh, and sort of instant, which is what people want now.") But when Testino asked him to pose with his wife he obliged, and Testino cried "Wow!," which was more than the moment required. Bailey smiled.



This, I saw, is the Testino trick. He is not insincere, and he's not exactly camp. He's *hammy:* he crosses a line into a kind of hypnotic absurdity. Because he sits at fashion's high table, he lives on a diet that's rich in rhapsody. He enjoys an endless summer of his own making—he works every day, and likes to work in sunlight, so he follows fine weather around the globe—and he exists in a microclimate of perpetual flattery. He is flattered, and he flatters in return. But he will not be out-flattered. He takes everyday fashion-industry hyperbole—"You look amazing"—and he whips it into a supercharged, wide-eyed, theatrical confection: *"A! May! Zing!"* With deliberate self-mockery, he acts like a Latin maître d' in a Marx Brothers movie, and this charms people—Princess Diana, Madonna, and a thousand models—and things can now begin to arrange themselves into a Mario Testino photograph, into the loose-limbed and playfully sexual pictures that his clients crave, pictures that we might have taken ourselves, at the beach or at a party, if only our lives were utterly different.

"We depend on Mario," Justine Picardie, the features director of British *Vogue*, told me. "He can take a picture of a model and give us the illusion of reality—make the model look fresh and spontaneous and real. But what's also important is that Mario can take a picture of a celebrity and make her look like a model. Which is quite hard. Because a model's there as a model. She's six feet tall and a hundred and five pounds and eighteen years old. How old are the Hollywood actresses? How old's Meg Ryan? Or Rene Russo? I'll be pitching British *Vogue* to a Hollywood agent, and I'll say, 'We really want to do So-and-So,' and they'll say, 'Oh, sure, yeah'—not very interested—and I'll say, 'And Mario might be available,' and, oh, suddenly everything changes."

Earlier this year, Testino hit a rare snag, when Tom Ford, the creative director of Gucci—the fashion name with which he has been most closely associated—rejected his latest photographs for an ad campaign, and asked another, younger photographer to replace him. According to Testino, the rejection came after he had told Ford that the fall, 2000, campaign would be his last one for Gucci. He wanted to move on. Ford has said, simply, "I think maybe we got too comfortable with each other." But if this is the beginning of the end of Testino's career it doesn't look that way. In a four- or five-week period this summer, Testino shot dozens of fashion pages for American *Vogue*, *W*, *L'Uomo Vogue*, *V*, and *The Face;* he did covers for Japanese *Vogue*, Brazilian *Vogue*, and *Vanity Fair;* and he photographed twenty pages of Hollywood portraits for British *Vogue* and, for the same magazine, a cover featuring the British pop star Robbie Williams with Gisele Bündchen, the Brazilian supermodel, whom Testino more or less discovered. He guest-edited the forthcoming "Man" issue of the fearlessly expensive New York fashion and art magazine *Visionaire*. He took portraits of Princess Michael of

Testino (above), photographed by Sean Ellis, and two of his fashion pictures. "I act by instinct," Testino says. "I do, and then I think."

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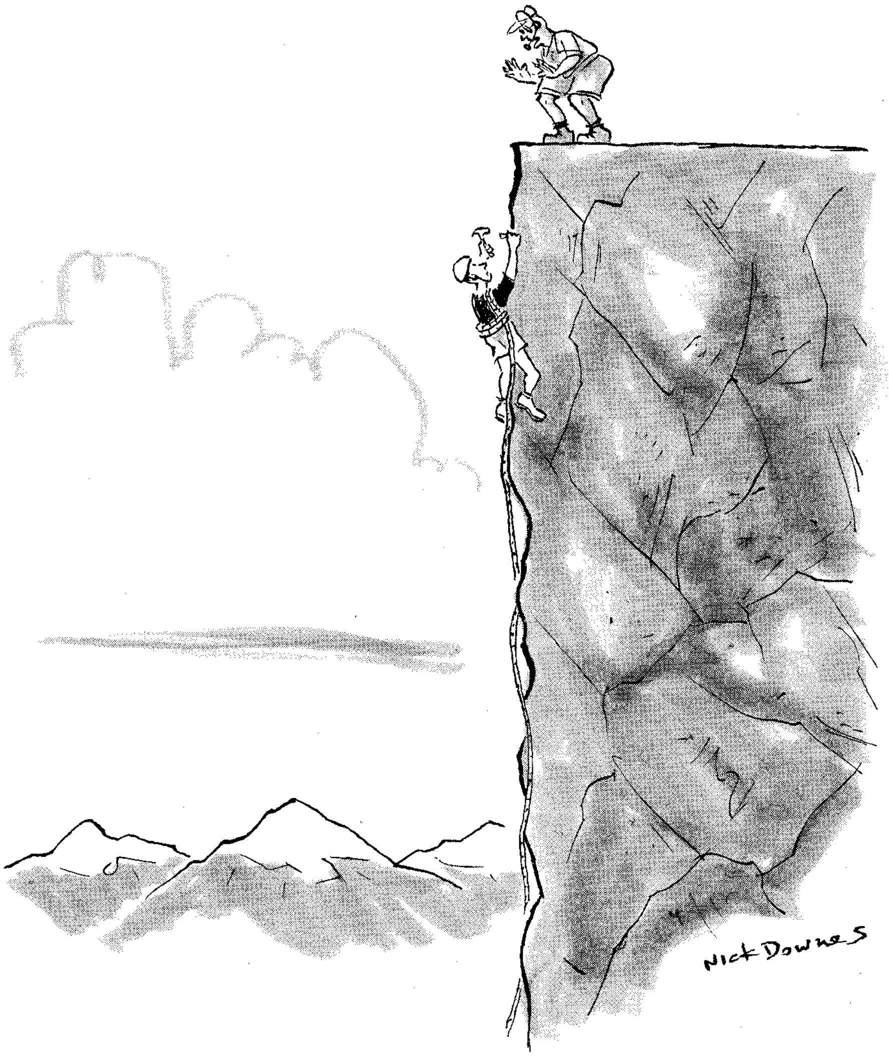
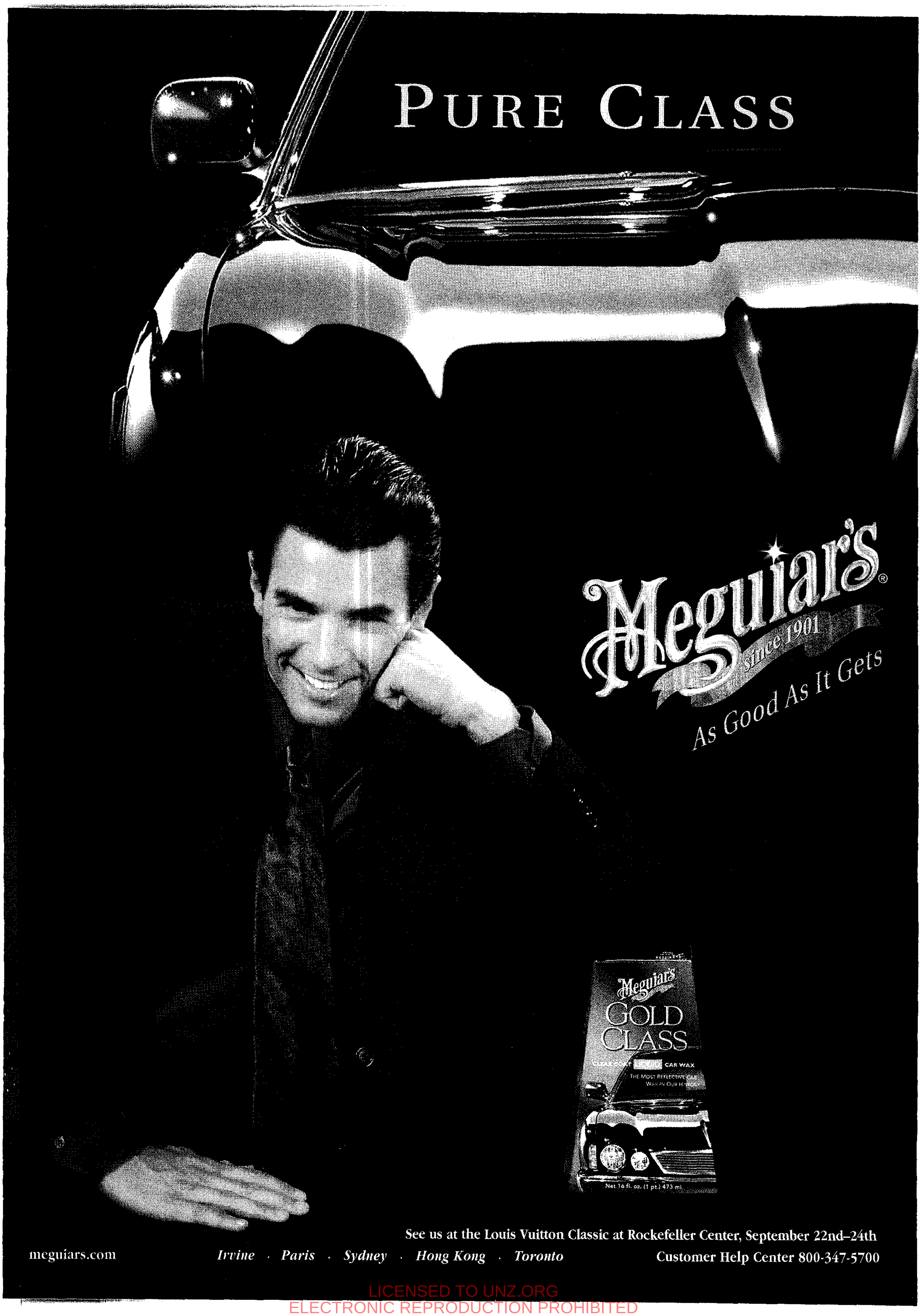


"Sorry, sir, we're filming a truck commercial up here."

• •

Kent and the Duke of Kent, for a future exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, in London. He worked on two forthcoming books of his non-fashion photographs. He photographed an advertising campaign for Dolce & Gabbana's perfume, D & G, and one for Ralph Lauren, and during a three-day shoot in California he played a key role in updating the image of the Tommy Hilfiger brand (just as he'd previously helped update Gucci, Burberry, and Missoni).

In the middle of this schedule, he flew to Italy for a week to photograph twelve leading models for the limited-edition and artfully titillating calendar with which the Pirelli tire company raises its media profile every year. (The Pirelli commission is a prestigious one, and in the past five years it has been accepted by Peter Lindbergh, Richard Avedon, Bruce Weber, Herb Ritts, and Annie Leibovitz.) A couple of days before the Pirelli shoot began, I met Testino on the rooftop terrace of his hotel in Naples, where he was eating breakfast in painfully bright sunshine. There was a view of Vesuvius, and of container ships moving slowly in the bay. Testino was wearing shorts, a short-sleeved shirt, and Birkenstock sandals—his unchanging daytime wardrobe—and he was making self-deprecating observations about his body shape. "I'm in the sun all the time, with incredible-looking people around me," he was saying. "And there I go: me and my stomach." But he seemed profoundly content. He is known to like comfort—luxury hotels, first-class airline seats, and driving down Sunset Boulevard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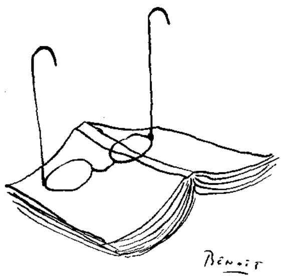
in a convertible with the music turned way up. This is fortunate; he can photograph the high life without irony. "He's interested in the kind of people who wear the clothes he photographs," Anna Wintour, the editor-in-chief of American *Vogue*, says. "It's a perfect match."

Testino made an impassioned order of cappuccinos, and then talked about his childhood, speaking in English that is comfortably idiomatic but heavily accented (and widely imitated by his colleagues, who even imitate his complaints about the imitations: "Quite *beetchy*. Quite *beetchy*, actually"). He was born in 1954, one of six children, and he grew up in a fashionable residential neighborhood of Lima, Peru. His mother is of Spanish and Irish descent; his father was the son of Italian immigrants. Testino went to an English-speaking school, and for a while he had ambitions to become a priest. He was a quiet, bright boy, and particularly adept at mathematics. But as a young teen-ager he was unpopular, and he felt excluded from the more glamorous circles of Peruvian youth—a condition that may have had something to do with his wardrobe, which had begun to fill with alarming fluorescent, brocaded, and terry-cloth garments. At the age of sixteen, he was rescued from the social margins by two sophisticated older girls who let him into their world. "They dressed incredibly, and they partied late, and they were in control," he said. To Testino—who would prefer not to be identified as anything quite so categorical as gay—those girls continue to represent an ideal of womanly chic. He said that now when he looks for new models—he sees about two hundred a month, each one for less than a minute—he is always trying to rediscover his teen-age rescuers. Three years ago, Gisele Bündchen came to see him in New York, and he was struck by her vivacity. "When you really look at her, she's not your classic beauty. Her eyes are a bit small, her nose is a bit big. She's a pretty girl—I'm not saying she's ugly—and she has an unbelievable body. But wherever you see her you feel like she's having more fun than anybody else in that room."

The sixteen-year-old Testino—now officially cool—joined a party that lasted about seven years. "We had a military government, and everything was upside down," he said. "We had curfews. We just partied the whole night, and at five o'clock we'd go home." This life was underwritten by sympathetic parents, and was barely disturbed by his adventures in further education: he began an economics degree, then a law degree, then, in San Diego, a course in international relations. In 1976, he moved to London and dyed his hair pink. When Peruvian inflation threatened his allowance from home, he took a job as a waiter. He was a "useless" waiter, he said, because he had a phobia about getting his hands dirty. An alternative career suggested itself: Testino had once taken a brief photography course, and now, in 1980, he began to take pictures professionally. Everyone in British fashion at the time remembers Testino in his supplicant phase, carrying his portfolio around and smiling impishly in magazine reception rooms. "He was *always* there," one contemporary says. According to Hamish Bowles, an old friend of Testino's who is now the European editor-at-large of American *Vogue*, "From the very beginning, Mario had a very intuitive sense of fashion. People assume it goes with the territory, but it often doesn't. In fact, it's extremely rare." By the mid-eighties, Testino had made a name for himself in Europe with photographs that Alexandra Shulman, the editor of British *Vogue*, describes as "very camp and rather rigid." Enthralled by English country-house bohemianism, he made elaborate set pieces, involving teacups and Chihuahuas.

"I would go shopping for second-hand clothes," Testino said, pulling a disgusted face. "And I would hate the smell of the shop. I was born and raised in South America. I like a sexy girl dressed in a sexy outfit and done up. And the English like an undone girl in her grandmother's clothes. There's a

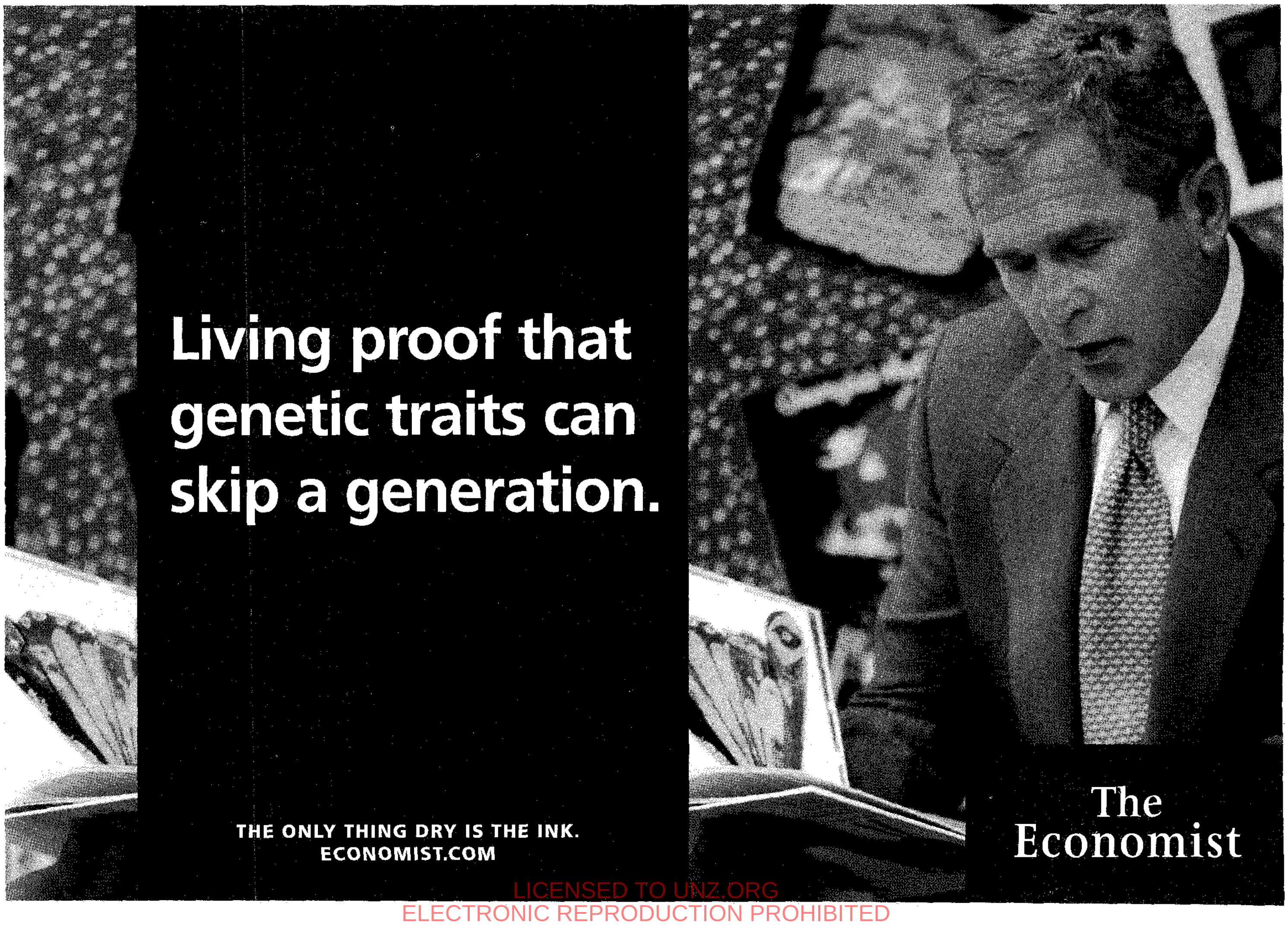


difference. For ten years, I tried to do Diana Cooper and Cecil Beaton’s images. But I wasn’t Cecil Beaton, and I didn’t know Diana Cooper.”

Later that morning, Testino was driven around Naples to look at locations that his assistants had scouted for the Pirelli shoot: the sixteenth-century Palazzo d’Avalos; and a vast room underneath the Galleria Umberto I, once a night club, now full of picturesque junk, including billiard tables covered with heaps of dusty coat hangers. Testino did a lot of handshaking, exclaimed, “So chic!,” and, between stops, talked on his hands-free cell phone, somehow managing to make insistence sound playful: “Call the agent, and say that I’ve never photographed *anyone* in a negative way.” He laughed. “This is a sophisticated, artistic thing. They’ll be more like celebrities, not just models.” Meanwhile, Thomas Nutzl, Testino’s easygoing chief assistant, took pictures through the window of bus passengers and pedestrians. I could imagine his collection: thousands of photographs taken from luxury rental cars in sunny cities.

For lunch, a long table had been booked at a waterside restaurant. Members of Testino’s entourage were flying in from New York and London and Paris. (Testino does not skimp on collaborators. There were fifty names on the Pirelli call sheet, excluding a stout Neapolitan policeman who, according to unwritten regulations, would be at the shoot to keep a close eye on any international model taking her shirt off within city limits.) Over lunch, Testino shuffled through Polaroid photographs of possible extras. “These are *desperate* waiters,” he said to the table. “There are *so* many good-looking waiters in town.” He glanced around the restaurant’s terrace, hoping that the staff might provide an instant solution. Then: “Day four—Ana Claudia should be the one scuba-diving, and maybe have her bending down with her butt showing.” After lunch, a more general question arose about the Pirelli calendar. “No pubic hair?” Testino asked, disappointed. People began to make phone calls. “I’m sure Richard Avedon had pubic hair.”

Toward the end of the nineteen-eighties, Testino fell out of favor. A shoot for Italian *Vogue* was rejected, and he suddenly found himself, as he puts it, “left out in the air.” For a while, he concentrated on uncommissioned photographs of male nudes. He used skinny models found in real life—in reaction, he says, to Bruce Weber’s fashionable hunks. He wanted “to find out how to make people look their best, just through light.” Then, in 1990, Testino showed the nudes to Carine Roitfeld, a French fashion stylist, who, when I met her, was carrying a dress of unfathomable thinness in what looked like a pizza box. “I said to Mario, ‘Why don’t you shoot your fashion photos like you shoot the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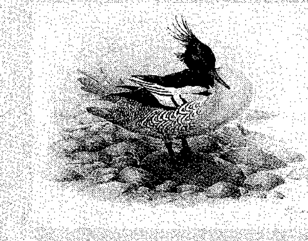

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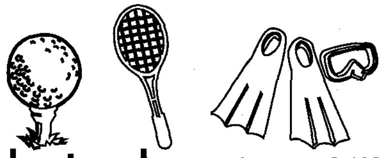

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nudes?' " Roitfeld told me. This advice brought an immediate commission from French *Glamour*, and, with Roitfeld as the stylist, a Testino Woman began to emerge. "We started to make each model more of a human being—to give her a personality," Roitfeld says. "The way of walking, the way of sitting, the way of biting the nails." In effect, Roitfeld was steering Testino away from the example of Beaton, and reminding him of the example of Avedon, who, more than forty years earlier, had done away with sculptural silhouettes in favor of movement, fresh air, and a (carefully staged) sense of real life. Roitfeld's advice to Testino echoes Avedon's own advice to fashion photographers: "Take a model you're drawn to, and then imagine her as a woman."

Testino went back to the dreamy years of his late teens. "Before I met Carine," Testino says, "I didn't realize: I'm not English, I'm not French, I'm Peruvian." His photographs began to recall the atmosphere of his curfew parties. Today, when you see a Testino picture of a crotch in a bathing suit (and you are likely to see quite a few), there will be something of Lima and Rio in the seventies—and a sense of the stop-go influences of strict Catholicism and bare flesh acting upon a middle-class boy who was good at algebra. But for the moment Testino's timing was off. While he and Roitfeld were developing a new, frisky South American idiom, the trend in fashion photography was toward waifs wasting away on soiled mattresses in inner-city interiors. Testino admired the style, but he found it alien. "The people who determined grunge, maybe they lived in council flats, maybe it was their whole upbringing," he says. "You know, my upbringing hasn't been like that. I like comfort. I like glamour. But I took the real aspect." For Testino, "real" was late-night Lima.

A few years later, fashion caught up with Testino. Grunge begun to sour the relationship between advertisers and fashion magazines, particularly after the media fuss over Corinne Day's photographs for British *Vogue* in January of 1993, which showed Kate Moss in apparent need of a social worker. Not long afterward, in an early sign of things to come, Nick Knight, doing work for British *Vogue*, began using ring flash, flooding the model's face with light in a way that recalled earlier, more glamorous fashion photography. The moment, for Testino, fully arrived in 1995, when he and Roitfeld began producing images for Tom Ford, the newly appointed creative head of Gucci. In these photographs, heroin chic had given way to cocaine chic. "We entered into the Gucci world," Roitfeld says. "Studio 54, rock-and-roll people, very wealthy people." The images were flashy, but they were still manageably mainstream: they gave the viewer a friendly welcome. When Gucci experienced a surge in popularity, Testino and Roitfeld could take a fair share of the credit.

Gucci's success put Testino in the front rank of fashion photographers, and in 1997 he scored a coup as a celebrity portraitist. That spring, Princess Diana, who was newly divorced and was promoting a charity sale of her dresses, asked to be photographed by Testino for *Vanity Fair*. She was nervous upon arriving for the shoot, and when Testino asked her to sit down she kept her knees together and her hands on her knees. Testino suggested another pose. "I said, 'Me, I sit like *that*.' " He flung himself, sprawling, onto the couch. Before long, he was shooting her in smiling, horizontal poses. The pictures, which were published shortly before her death, became iconic, valedictory images. Testino is modest about his achievement with the Princess. "People say, 'Oh, my God, you changed her,' " he says. "No, I didn't. I caught her at the moment when she had just freed herself from a lot of burdens."

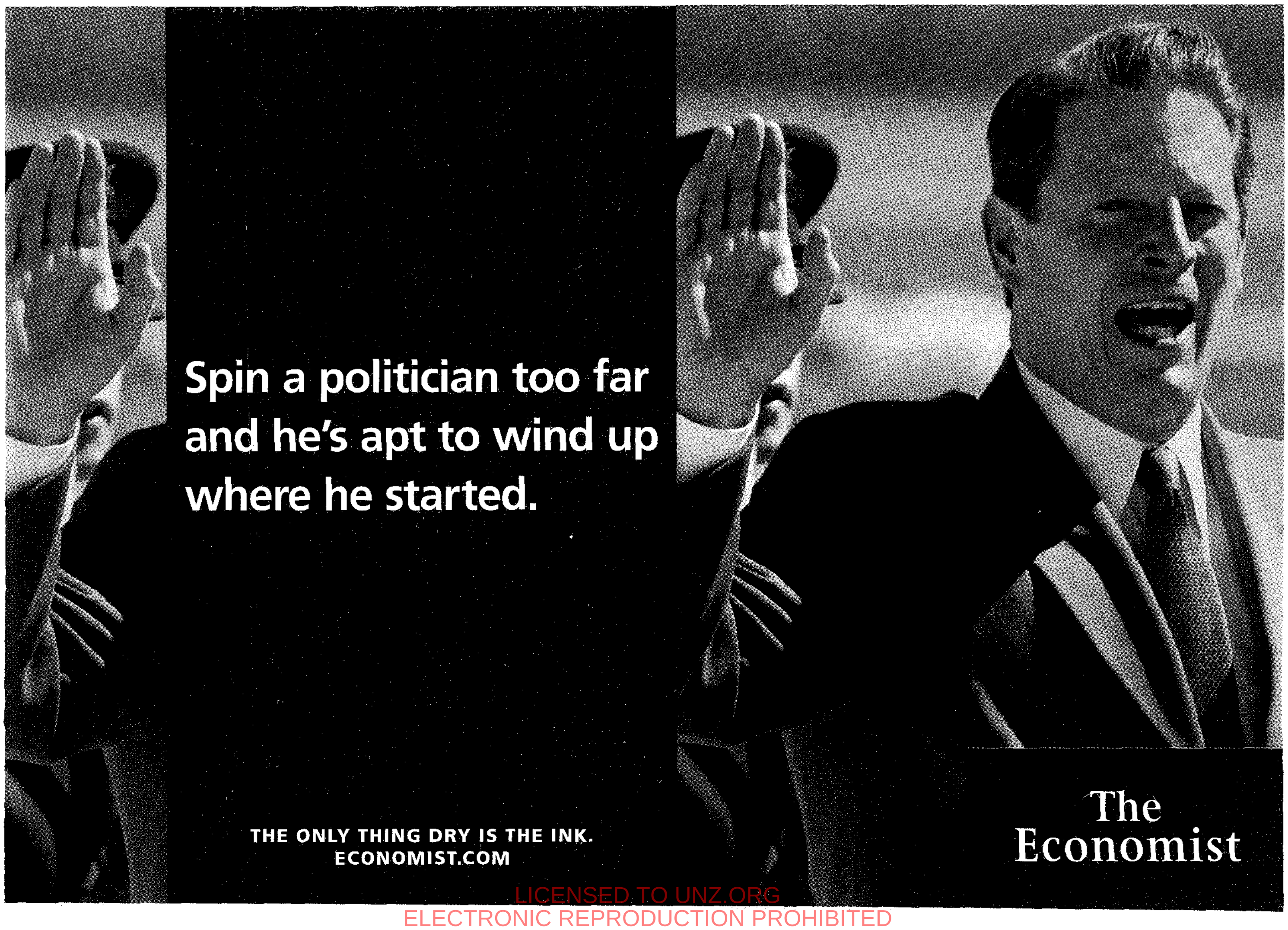
Gucci and Diana vastly expanded the demand for the trademark Testino image: a sunny, idealized holiday photo, carrying a hint of sexual intrigue, in a relaxed composition that might allow for a blurry limb or two in the foreground. A magazine once described these pictures as "happy snaps," and Testino is quite comfortable with the phrase. He prides himself on his casting skills, his ability to identify "not what turns me on, but what I know will turn a hundred thousand people on." He knows how good he is at getting people to relax. And, he says, "I guess I have an eye for beauty. I can tell you that a line under the eye is killing your face, or you shouldn't use a particular lipstick." When I mentioned that David Bailey had called his work "instant," he said, "So what? Polaroids are instant, and I think they're fantastic."

In "Appearances," a history of fashion photography, Martin Harrison writes, "The obsessions of leading fashion photographers tend not to be with costume at all: they have coerced their medium into becoming a vehicle only marginally related to the need to sell dresses." Harrison quotes Avedon: "Fashion photography must be about something." Testino's photography is about something, but what it is about, unambiguously, is fashion. It fuses a model's gaze with, say, a skirt and a speedboat, in a way that causes money to change hands. (In Testino's own phrase: "You have to get people to stand up and go to the shops.") Testino shows what a dress feels like when it feels right, at four in the morning. He fills his photographs with people who are happy in their narcissism, who return your stare with slouchy straightforwardness. Their expressions say openly what is sometimes only whispered in other fashion photographs: look at us.

Charlotte Cotton, who is curating an exhibition of contemporary fashion photography called "Imperfect Beauty," at the Victoria and Albert Museum, in London, says, "Testino's work is pro-fashion, it's rich, it isn't frightened about consumption, it's not apologetic. It's fashion photography as full-blown as it can be." Others put it less kindly. One fashion editor calls Testino's photographs "the apotheosis of shallowness," and adds, "I don't see a lot of nuance in Mario's pictures. I just see a girl falling out of her dress at a party. All the classic photographers, like Irving Penn—they're arresting, they're timeless. Mario's pictures are of the moment. They are now. He's hot. He's hot hot hot. That's all there is to it."

In an unreflective age, Testino is utterly of his time. His vision of endless hedonism and good cheer happens to coincide with what today's fashion magazines are trying to sell. He thinks the way a glossy magazine looks. To critics who accuse him of not trying to push beyond the requirements of his profession, he says, "I'm a fashion photographer. I want to collect art, I don't want to be art. You need patience, I have no patience. You need time, I have no time."

The first photographs for the 2001 Pirelli calendar were shot in the center of Naples, in the Palazzo d'Avalos, where an elderly prince lives with his wife and son. In a high-ceilinged room, Gisele Bündchen stood on a polished floor in front of an antique bed. Her legs, also polished, were bare, and she lifted a black Chanel top to reveal what she called the "under part" of her left breast. Testino's theme for the calendar was "flashing." (It is his usual theme, one might argue.) The assistants were chatting; "Last Night a D.J. Saved My Life" played loudly. Watch-



Spin a politician too far and he's apt to wind up where he started.
THE ONLY THING DRY IS THE INK.
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ing all this, I realized that the easy charms of a Testino fashion photograph derive, in part, from the fact that the atmosphere of the shoot is implicitly part of the image. Whether the setting is a beach, a desert, or a crumbling Neapolitan palazzo, a Testino photograph is a record of the world as he lives it—a party with a purpose.

"I act by instinct," Testino says. "I do, and then I think." Some decisions about this picture—the room, the bed, the suggestion of aristocratic loucheness—had been made ahead of time. Other matters were still being settled, such as what and how much to expose of Bündchen. Which hand? Which breast? Testino resolved these questions easily. (I'd been told that his quickness in composing a shot was connected to his mathematical expertise as a child.) Once he began to shoot, you could have easily missed the moment. It was as if taking pictures were only one of the things that might happen, including a game of five-a-side soccer. Testino tapped his bare feet to the music and drew "beautiful" into four long syllables. The former model Cecilia Dean, who is a co-editor of *Visionaire,* and who was often photographed by Testino in the mid-nineteen-eighties, had told me, "Modelling tends to be a very surreal experience, but with Mario you're so obviously *doing a fashion photograph* that you live the fantasy. Instead of fighting being the center of attention, you give in to it. You relish the experience." As Bündchen posed, she delivered a continuous ironic supermodel babble: "Yeah, baby! Oh, baby! Oh, baby. Wahhh!"

WHITE BLOUSE WHITE SHIRT

Snow falls on the boardwalk
  where they never walked that winter,
street lamps in white boas, surf light
  patching shuttered storefronts.
Where are they? The Ferris wheel
  they once rode looks green.

In this other snapshot
  she wears pedal pushers,
he's in summer whites,
  they swing cigarettes
and hold hands, walking toward me,
  it seems, into breezy life,
where they don't know I'm waiting.
  Now they're renting a rolling chair.
Inside the wicker cowl he says,
  "A five-dollar ride, chief."
"It's Chinese, like Charlie Chan."
  Sand buries the sea noise,
resin scents rise from the boards
  into deft sea winds
as they roll past windows larvaed
  with delftware and sable stoles,
licking each other's fingers,
  French fries in paper cones.

When did the boardwalk look like that?
  When was that fresh love?
I stencil red-winged blackbirds
  into the scenes, and lilac
brushing window panes, and crocus,
  one garden of one season,
composite, where we look out,
  and between them I become
an hourglass of sand and light
  beside the ocean,
where the sun lets more snow
  fall around our heads.

—*W. S. Di Piero*

One evening a few weeks after the Pirelli shoot, I went to Testino's Paris office, in the Tenth Arrondissement. Although Testino's principal residence is in London, his business is in Paris, and it is here that he houses the greater part of two world-class collections—one of contemporary art photographs by, among others, Nan Goldin, Martin Parr, and Cindy Sherman, the other of photographic assistants. Contact sheets, prints, and layouts are continuously passing through this office, and at the end of every day Testino and Thomas Nutzl, in whatever expensive hotel they may be, edit them. On a long table were piles of prints ready for retouching, with transparent paper laid over beautiful faces, and a flurry of cruel red dots alerting the retouchers to the flaws underneath.

At ten o'clock, Testino turned his attention to his duties as guest editor of *Visionaire.* He sifted through transparencies of paintings and photographs for possible inclusion, while two assistants made suggestions and took notes. He was fast, and decisive. And now it was about eleven o'clock, and Testino, who had not eaten anything that evening, dashed downstairs and out onto the streets of Paris, and walked quickly for a couple of blocks, speaking to his brother in New York on his cell phone, then ducked through a metal gate, past a bouncer, down an alley, through a door, and into a room full of his Brazilian friends, and Brazilian music, where, five minutes later, his shirt was wet with sweat, and he was dancing on a table, drinking a caipirinha. ♦

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PROFILES

THE INVISIBLE DESIGNER

Can Helmut Lang become a brand name and still retain his mystique?

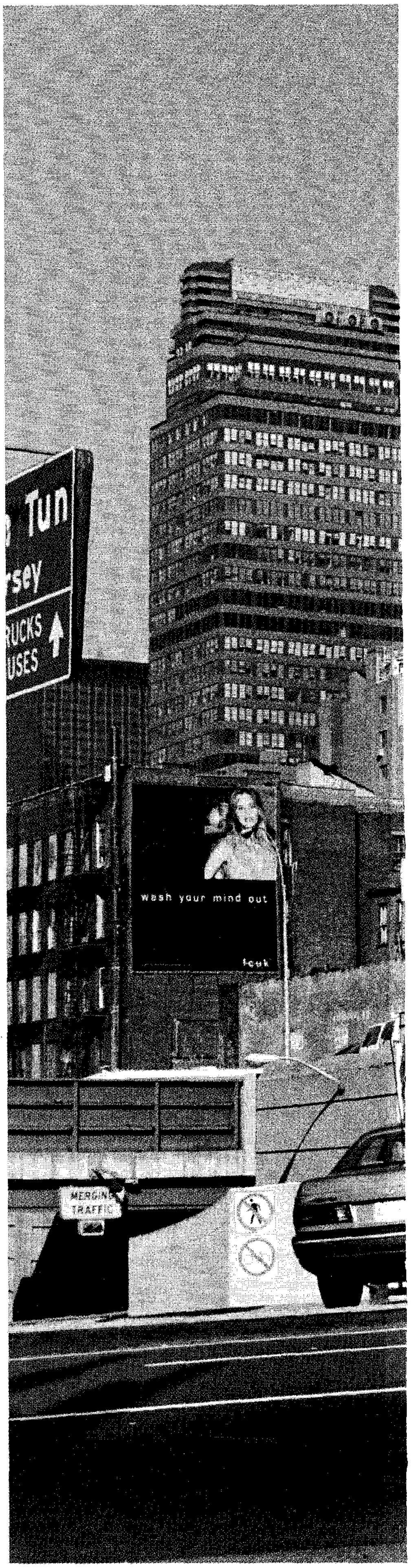
BY JOHN SEABROOK

About four years ago, in a men's store called Camouflage, in Chelsea, I tried on some trousers. They were perfectly ordinary-looking thin-wale corduroys, and yet something about them was different: the fabric was softer, the color was slightly subtler than basic black. The pants were unpleated, the rise was high, the leg slim. There was a loop for the button over the rear pocket, and an inner waist button—details you don't often find on sportswear. Was this fashion? Perhaps, but it was hidden; only I would know. The label was inside, too, small and not at all logomaniacal—just the words "Helmut Lang" in black on white. It seemed intended to evoke the "tickets" you find inside bespoke suits from made-to-measure tailors. The pants cost a hundred and twenty dollars—not bad, as designer clothes go. I bought them.

This encounter occurred during my quest to shed the preppy uniforms I'd been wearing in the fifteen years since college—a tux for formal occasions, a suit for church and funerals, a blue blazer and tailored slacks for looking "smart," a polo shirt and khakis for going out on weekends—and to find a more casual style, one that was better suited to the identity I was imagining for myself. (Clothes, of course, are not so much about who you are as who you want to be.) I had discovered the melancholy truth that men everywhere have learned as they try to master the new casual style at the office: dressing casually actually requires that a man take fashion more seriously than dressing formally does. The new casual, like the old casual, is supposed to give an appearance of ease, of comfort with yourself. But, unlike the old casual, the new casual is all about status. "Casual Power," a recent style guide by Sherry Maysonave, describes a hierarchy with six different levels of casual attire: Active Casual, Rugged Casual (also called "outdoorsy"), Sporty Casual, Smart Casual (or "snappy"), Dressy Casual, and Business Casual. This may be the most depressing thing about the casual movement: no clothing is casual anymore.

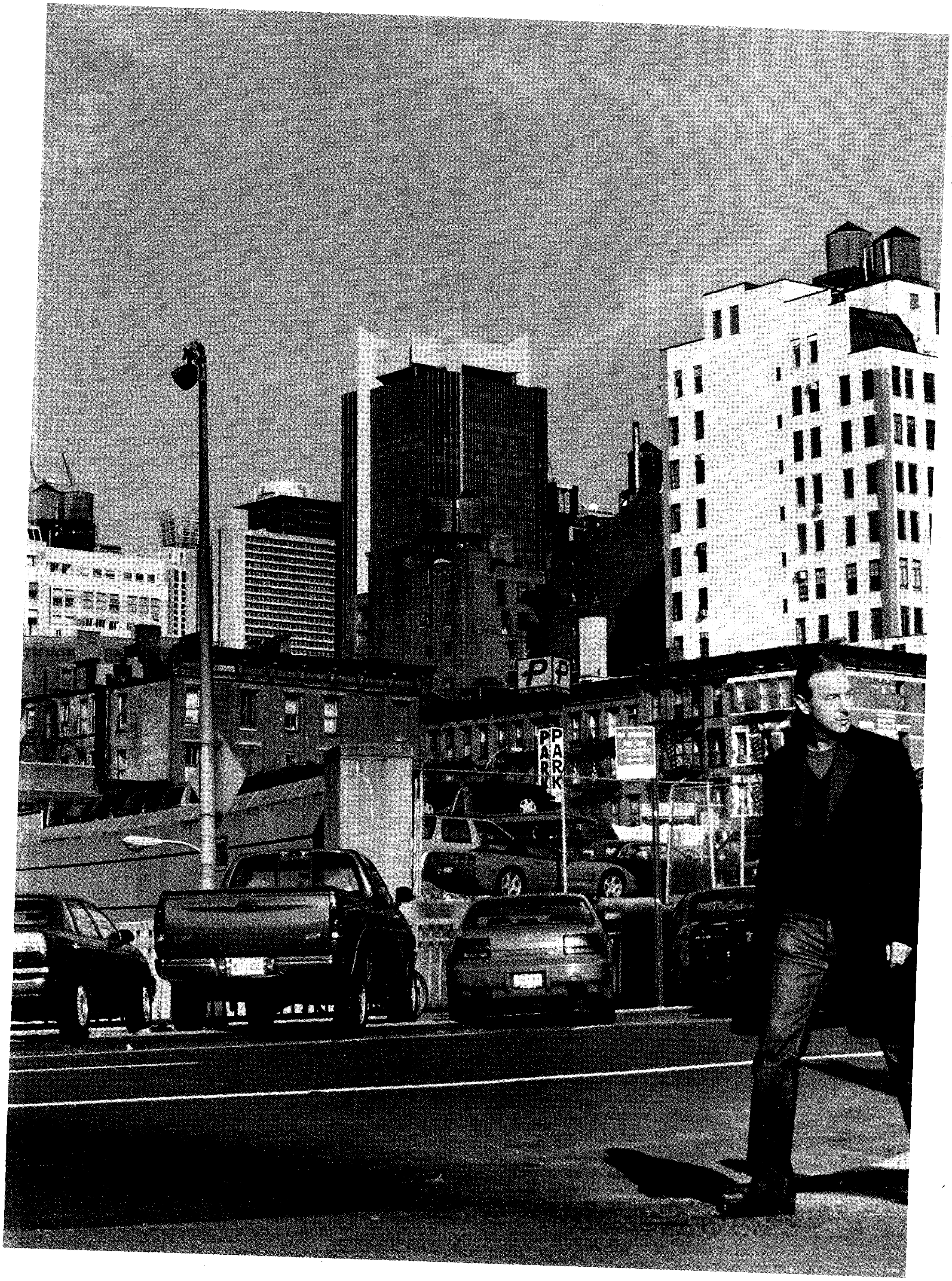
Helmut Lang, the Austrian-born designer, seemed to understand exactly what I needed—a uniform for the new casual world. I bought some more of his clothes: a ribbed cotton sweater that didn't stretch like my other cotton sweaters; a few pairs of khakis, which had a pleasingly crisp finish; a denim shirt; a woollen sweater in a beautiful straw color; and a pair of jeans. They were intelligent clothes, designed for a maximum number of situations, both work and play, which increasingly seem to be performed in the same outfits.

But there was also a deceptive aspect to my new uniforms. They appeared to be casual, but they were not, and I knew they weren't. The designer seemed to be playing off this stealthy quality by hiding certain nonfunctional fashion elements inside the clothes, such as the faux drawstrings inside the waistband of otherwise totally ordinary chinos. This hidden streak extends to the way the clothes are presented. The Helmut Lang store in SoHo, which was designed in close collaboration with Richard Gluckman, a New York-based architect of galleries and museums, violates the most basic principle of retail design: you are supposed to be able to see the merchandise. Here the clothes are con-



PHOTOGRAPH BY ELFIE SEMOTAN

Lang in Manhattan. "In Europe, they still respect the privacy of the artist. Here, when you have success, it's like you belong to the public."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cealed from view when you walk in—enclosed inside alcoves in the middle of the store. Hiding, it seems, is part of who Helmut Lang is.

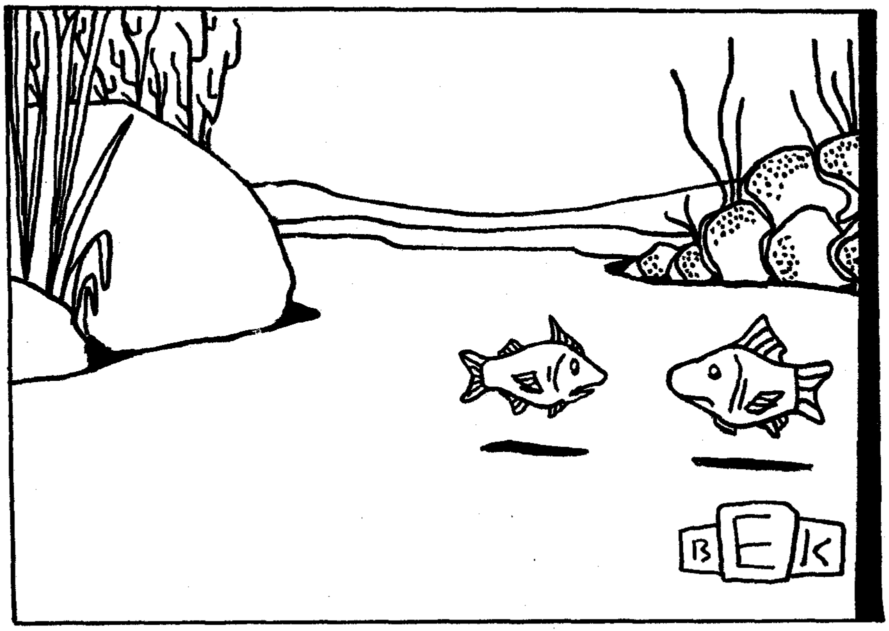
Hoping for a glimpse of the man whose name was inside my clothes, I attended this year's American Fashion Awards, which took place at Lincoln Center in June. Polly Mellen, a longtime arbiter of American fashion, was at a buffet supper preceding the awards, scanning the big white tent for that sleek, seal-like shape that she said she found so enchanting—Helmut Lang's head. "Where are you, Helmut, where are you?" she called out. "You are our glamour boy. You *have* to come."

Lang, who is forty-three years old, had been nominated for all three of the evening's major awards—for womenswear, menswear, and accessories—an honor never before bestowed on any designer. He moved his business from Paris to New York in 1997, and this spring he joined the Council of Fashion Designers of America. The C.F.D.A., which organized the awards ceremony, was happy to count as one of its own the designer whose utilitarian, austere, sportswear-inspired aesthetic was widely copied during the nineties, and became the dominant style of the decade: minimalism. These honors were a way of recognizing his influence, which is likely to increase—Lang recently formed a partnership with the Prada Group—as well as a way of welcoming him to the club.

Tommy Hilfiger was in the tent, shaking hands and flashing his toothy, sideways grin. Chloë Sevigny came in wearing a Helmut Lang organza skirt. Elizabeth Hurley and Claudia Schiffer appeared, looking very eighties, both in gorgeous, shimmery Valentino gowns with ruffles around the bosom. There is nothing restrained about Valentino—elegance and beauty come before comfort and function. "Too fussy," pronounced Polly Mellen, continuing her search for Helmut Lang.

But Lang was nowhere to be found. It seemed he had decided to stay in his SoHo headquarters, where he was working on his spring, 2001, menswear collection. (Fern Mallis, the C.F.D.A.'s executive director, received word from Lang's P.R. agency about an hour before the event began, and said she was "flabbergasted.") As the news spread that Lang was not going to appear at the party, the festive spirit began to leak out of the tent. There was a feeling that Lang might not want to be a member of the club, after all.

Lang lost the first big award of the evening, Accessory Designer of the Year, which went to the team of Richard Lambertson and John Truex. But he won the next one—Menswear Designer of the Year. When his name was announced, many in the audience, not yet aware of his absence, expected a rare sighting of the man himself, and there was an audible groan as Ingrid Sischy, the editor-in-chief of *Interview*, appeared out of the darkness and mounted the podium, where she solemnly accepted the award for Lang, whom she thanked for "changing the rules in American fashion." The line did not go over well with the crowd, which included most of the rulemakers. (Cathy Horyn, the *Times* fashion critic, was sitting next to Oscar de la Renta and his entourage, and later wrote that de la Renta repeated "Changed American fashion?" in an incredulous tone.)



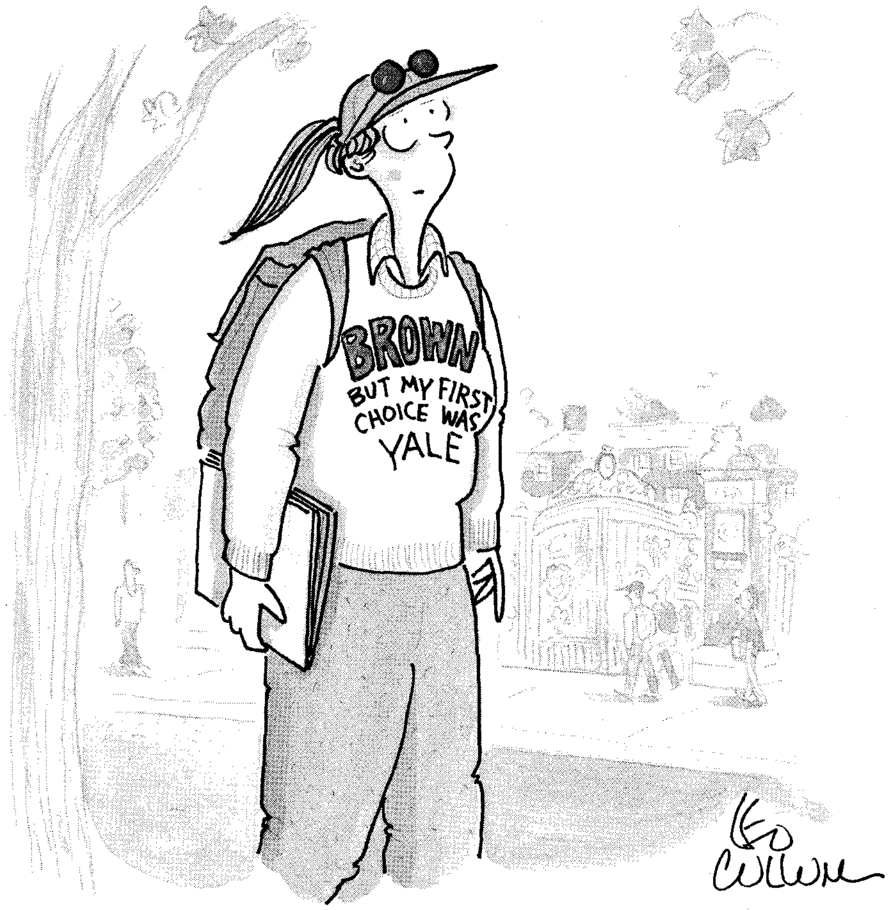
"Now they're saying shiny things attached to hooks are bad for you."

The competition for the evening's most prestigious award, Womenswear Designer of the Year, was widely thought to be between de la Renta, who first achieved fame as a society designer in the eighties, and Lang. (The third nominee was Donna Karan.) It was a contest between excess and restraint. When de la Renta won, to wild cheering, it seemed like another sign that the eighties were back in business.

There was a feeling among the people I spoke to after the awards that this time Helmut had gone too far. "We all have to do things we don't want to do sometimes," said André Leon Talley, the editor-at-large of *Vogue*. Anna Wintour described Helmut's decision as "a mistake." "If he had been out of the country, maybe, but he was just downtown. I realize he was *working*," she said, with mock reverence. (Part of the mystique that surrounds Lang derives from the intensity with which he approaches his work, and his Germanic attention to detail. He works "like a wild man," says the artist Jenny Holzer, his friend and sometime collaborator.) Still, Wintour went on, "If I had known he wasn't coming, I would have called him. It was discourteous not to turn up."

Lang has annoyed the American fashion community before by violating the protocol. He has rebelled against the onerous schedule of runway presentations, the four yearly spectacles (two each for the men's and women's lines) at which designers are supposed to submit new work to the scrutiny of the press and of the buyers from the big department stores. Lang shows his men's clothes together with his women's, but even this seems too much for him. (He calls his presentations not collections but *séances de travail*—working sessions.) A week before his fall-winter, 1998, show, Lang decided to cancel his runway presentation and show pictures of his clothes on the Internet instead. Fashion editors were given CD-ROMs.

Fashion people love to use the word "modern" to justify the latest trend, but the fashion industry is quite unmodern, and becoming steadily more so as its old top-down hierarchy falls farther and farther out of touch with the casual-all-year-long world we live in. The collections are about display, and Helmut Lang has a deep aversion to display. It runs through everything he does, from his minimalism to his conspicuous absence from the American Fashion Awards. This is the way in which Lang really is trying to change the rules—to make fashion less about creating a spectacle for the press and more about the problem most people face when they think of fashion, which is simply what to put on in the morning.


BROWN
BUT MY FIRST CHOICE WAS YALE
Leo Cullum

If you go into the Helmut Lang store on Greene Street, you will see four racks of clothing, two of men's and two of women's. The least expensive clothes in the store, T-shirts and jeans, often hang next to the most expensive items, silk and chiffon dresses and shearling coats. Most designers are careful to keep their high-priced, more formal clothes separate from their lower-priced casual wear. Armani, for example, has an expensive Giorgio Armani line, a sportswear-oriented Emporio Armani line, and a casual A/X Armani Exchange line. Lang has only one line, Helmut Lang, and instead of diversifying as his business grows, he is doing the opposite—his short-lived Helmut Lang Jeans line was recently reabsorbed into the parent.

Lang's mixing of the casual and the formal is not just a matter of marketing; it goes to the core of his aesthetic. His most expensive formal clothes have the ease and simplicity of everyday stuff, and his casual clothes have the correctness and detailing of ready-to-wear. Most high-fashion designers, whose natural leanings are toward ornament and glamour, don't do casual clothes very well—the fabric is too rich, the styling too elaborate. But Lang's distinction as a designer is his instinct for the appeal of the most basic items, like an old blue sweatshirt or a T-shirt worn silky with use, and he has created a whole new genre of luxury casual clothes. According to Katherine Betts, the editor-in-chief of *Harper's Bazaar*, "Lang did for T-shirts and jeans what Ralph Lauren did for club ties and tweed jackets—he made them fashion garments."

This transformation, the making of fashion out of everyday clothes, is a sleight of hand that involves more than just design. It is also a matter of the designer's image: the idea that the brand name conveys. The great couturiers, like Coco Chanel and Christian Dior, stood for the idea of high fashion—an élite enterprise that only the rich could afford. Then came the Italian fashion princes, like Armani and Gianni Versace, who used their own media celebrity to give ready-to-wear clothes the kind of allure that made-to-measure clothes used to have. One cannot see their names without thinking of their faces: fit and bronzed Italian men, relaxing in their villas, attractive in a way that made the clothes attractive. Then came Ralph Lauren, who used "life-style marketing"—associating his clothes with upper-middle-class Americans—to create a new kind of fashion image. Lauren's face was an inescapable part of the image—tanned, smiling, somewhere-out-there-on-the-range Ralph.

What does Helmut Lang stand for? It's not the idea of high fashion, nor is it any one particular life style, nor is it the personal fabulousness of Lang himself. There is no picture of Helmut Lang to go with the name—a rarity in our visual, celebrity-conscious culture—and he almost never uses models in his ads. Often the ads don't even show his clothes: you just see the words "Helmut Lang." But this is precisely what makes Lang appealing: his name seems to stand for something more than just clothes. "When you hear the name Helmut Lang, you think of technology, of fabric, of movement, not just pants and skirts," Jeffrey Kalinsky, the owner of Jeffrey, a boutique in lower Manhattan, says. If

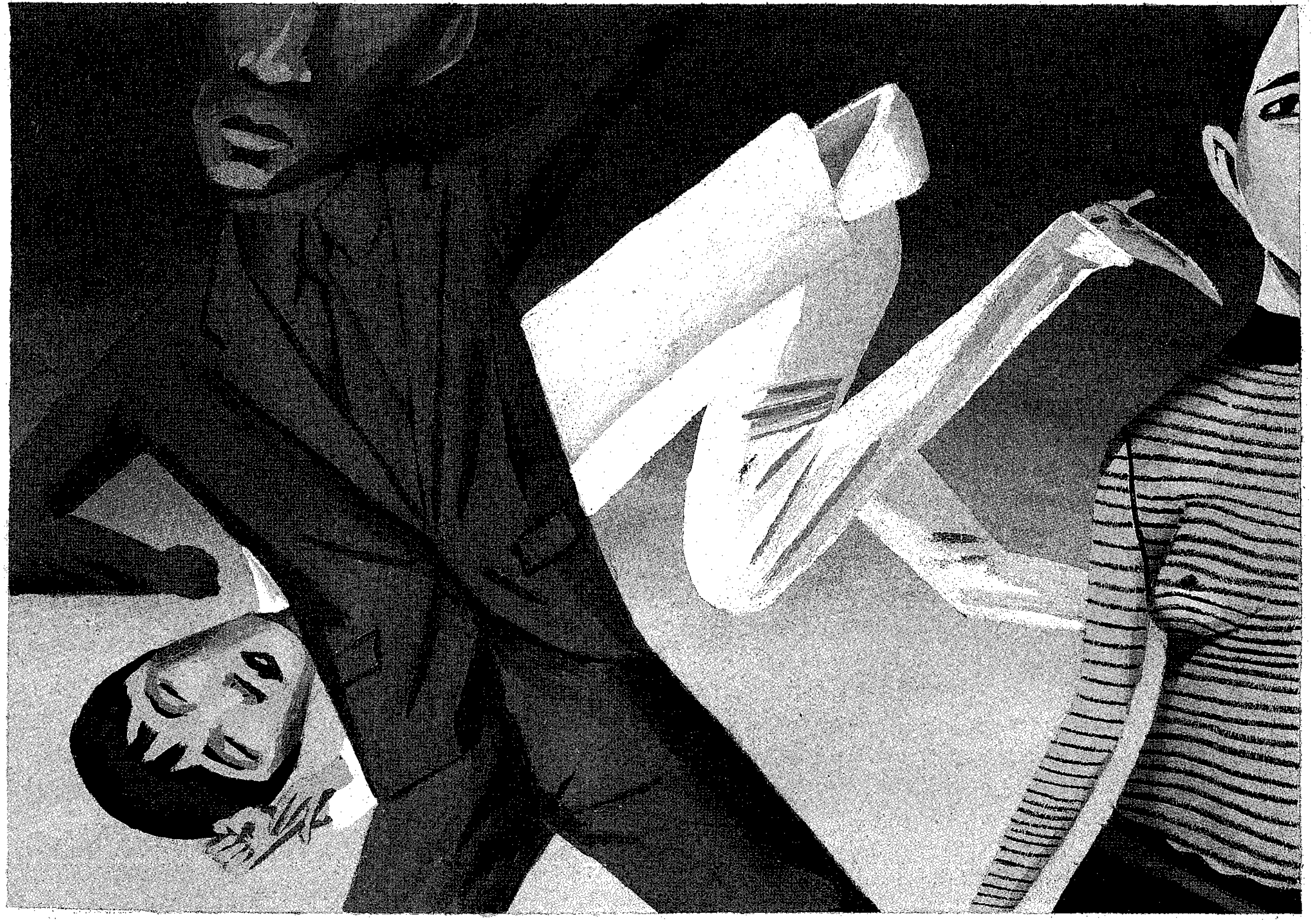
Lang's image has any precedent, it is in the avant-garde fashion brands, like Costume National, the Italian line designed by Ennio Capasa, or Comme des Garçons, the French company that the Japanese-born Rei Kawakubo designs for—companies that represent innovation, intelligent design, and an independent spirit. Lang's association with the art world—he has collaborated with Louise Bourgeois and Jenny Holzer—has also given his name the kind of artistic integrity that famous architects frequently enjoy, but fashion designers seldom do.

All of which makes Lang's decision, last year, to sell a fifty-one-per-cent stake of his company to the Prada Group somewhat perplexing. Prada has established itself as a major brand largely by mining the appeal of esoteric fashion and figuring out a way to make big business out of it. Faye I. Landes, a retailing analyst with the investment firm of Sanford C. Bernstein, told me, "What Prada is better at than anyone is taking avant-garde fashion and making it palatable for both starlets and ordinary people."

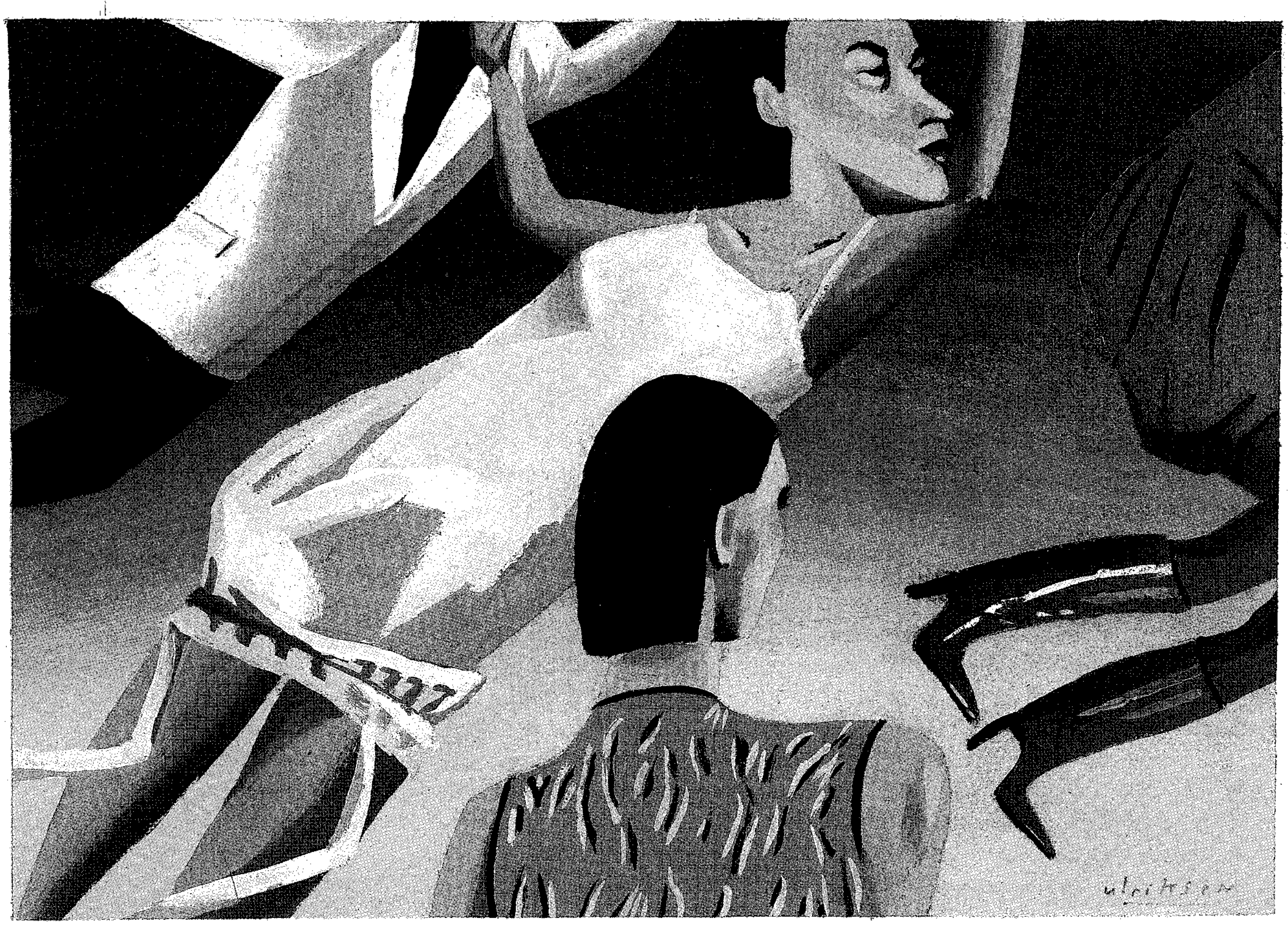
Led by Patrizio Bertelli, the husband of Miuccia Prada, the firm's chief clothing designer, the Prada Group has built up three of its own brands (Miu Miu, Prada Sport, and Prada) by carefully mixing the cutting edge with the classic. In the last six months of 1999, it consolidated its position as a leading luxury conglomerate by acquiring—in addition to a share of Helmut Lang—Jil Sander, the company run by its namesake, a German-born designer who shares Lang's minimalist approach; Church's, the English shoemaker; and fifty-one per cent of Fendi, together with LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton. Prada's blending of art and commerce has not been entirely smooth. Jil Sander's relationship with Prada went sour quickly, causing her to quit only five months after selling her company. (Having given up the rights to her name, she is currently not designing anywhere.)

Under the terms of the deal with Lang, Prada runs the business side of the operation, which includes distribution and manufacturing, and Lang retains control of design and advertising. Prada has developed a line of Helmut Lang accessories—shoes, bags, belts, wallets, eyewear, and luggage. Helmut Lang stores have opened in Hong Kong and Singapore, and are under construction in Tokyo and Kobe, and there are plans to open stores in London, Paris, and Los Angeles. In addition to all this Prada-led expansion, Procter & Gamble launched a complete line of Helmut Lang scents in May, and at the end of September a perfumery will open across the street from his flagship store, on Greene Street. There is talk of a new line of Helmut Lang cosmetics, possibly followed by Helmut Lang housewares. He may be a minimalist, but he wants to be a *big* minimalist.

One question this rapid expansion raises is to what extent Lang's image can retain its mystique if the designer himself becomes overexposed. Look at what happened to Tommy Hilfiger: his stock price lost almost half its value in



Clothes from Helmut Lang's autumn-winter collection for men and women feature a slew of his idiosyncratic touches.



Lang favors ribbon "extensions," bloomer skirts, and hobbled hemlines, in fabrics like cotton mesh and ceremonial wool silk.

MARK ULRIKSEN

the past year, as Tommy came to seem more like a brand manager than a designer. One might also ask how Lang, who has consistently gone against the prevailing current in fashion—whatever it may be—can maintain his independence under Prada. Ennio Capasa, of Costume National, told me recently that he did not see how a serious designer could sell to Prada and stay "authentic." "And if you are no longer authentic, what is the point?"

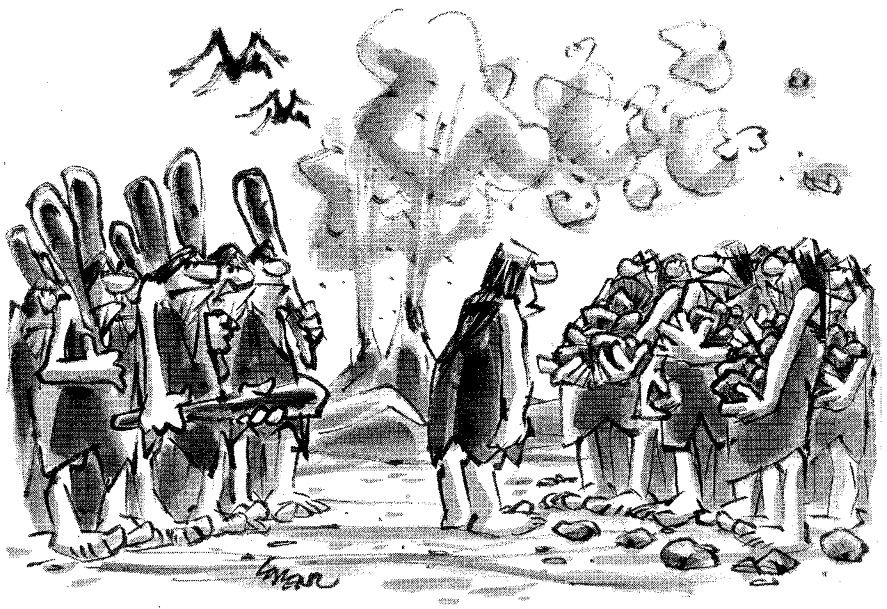
Lang's face changes, depending on how you look at him. From the front, he looks almost conventionally handsome: his forehead high and clear, and his eyes squinting at just the right French-movie-star angle of cool—there is something lively, almost merry, in them. But in profile he appears tortured, his eyes darting from under the hooded flesh at the corners, his mouth turned down at the edges.

I met Lang for the first time the day after the American Fashion Awards. Our initial meeting had been cancelled several times, so I expected this appointment to be cancelled, too; Lang, it seems, doesn't divide up his day in an orderly manner, but works intuitively, making of his schedule a raft of different possible commitments and deadlines and ideas, all awaiting the arrival of what he likes to call "the right organic moment." But it appeared that our right organic moment had arrived.

The showroom, which is on the second floor of 80 Greene Street, above the store, in the manner of the old Parisian couture houses, is reached via worn, tilting wooden stairs—the classic artist's-loft-in-SoHo staircase. (It is so authentic-looking that it may actually be authentic, which doesn't mean that it wasn't methodically thought out by Lang.) Going up and down the stairs were young men and women in Helmut uniforms: white shirts with the armholes cut high (which narrows the silhouette), black pants, and black shoes.

Helmut Lang was dressed in Helmut Lang, too: he was wearing a light-blue button-down shirt with an HL insignia, a crew-neck T-shirt visible underneath; Helmut Lang jeans, the stiff but not lacquered kind; and his new black patent-leather Helmut Lang shoes, without socks. He walked as though he had just dismounted from a motorcycle, legs slightly apart. His dark-brown hair was long and slicked back. When he smiled, his eyes appeared friendlier than his mouth, projecting the simultaneous feeling of ease and reserve you get from his clothes. He looked healthy, even slightly voluptuous, but there was also something "broken" about him, a word once used to describe what he wanted his male models to look like—interesting in a slightly fucked-up way.

It was a blisteringly hot day, but the showroom was cool and white. The fall, 2000, collection was hanging there, and editors and stylists were picking it over for items to use in photo shoots. I admired the gray wool-and-silk suits, which have an emerald shimmer when the silk catches the light. The men's clothes were more flamboyant than the women's. In the nineties, Lang dressed women like men,



"Here's the deal. In exchange for a ceasefire, they'll share their technology."

and earned the love of professional women everywhere. Now, like many other menswear designers, he seems to be trying to dress men like women.

The clothes exhibited certain characteristic Helmut Lang details: a fly-front coat with only one of the buttons exposed, a jean cuffed at a certain place, a strap in the back of a jacket, which is somewhat useful—it lets you hang the coat over your shoulder—but which is also an avant-garde element. At his most radical, he seems to be questioning the basics of what makes clothes clothes. There is a sense of whimsy in Lang. Last year, a padded collar that was clearly derived from those inflatable airplane headrests began showing up on some of the coats, both in the men's and the women's lines. Instead of a designer's personality being grafted onto the clothes through marketing and advertising, there is a personal voice in the clothes, expressed in these odd details and references.

I followed Lang back to the narrow business office behind the showroom. His new scent, Helmut Lang, wafted off him. The original scent was designed for a 1996 Florence Biennial project. Jenny Holzer, who created the text and images for the project, described the odor as "the smell of the morning after a passionate but difficult night." Lang's marketing director, Jonny Lichtenstein, described it as "the way a man smells right after he has had sex." When Lang's new signature scent was tested by Procter & Gamble focus groups, people reacted badly, but Lang refused to change it. That was the scent I was smelling now—flowery and buttery at the same time. Lang describes it as "on the borderline of an aftershave," and also "worn but fresh"—the olfactory equivalent of his casual clothes. Ron Perelman, the Revlon chairman, was recently spotted in the store buying five bottles.

Lang's English is almost perfect, but he speaks slowly, carefully, with little emphasis. He leans forward slightly when listening, in a manner that creates a certain intimacy. I asked him about his relationship with Prada. Lang said that Patrizio Bertelli's blunt and aggressive manner, a style that charms some people and alienates others, suited him very well. "I wanted a partner and had looked for one for a long time," he said. "It was frustrating to see our influence everywhere but not to have the money to grow big enough to benefit from it. So the question was whether to expand the company on my own or go with this other company. I had always wanted to have a business partner, because I don't like doing the business. And Bertelli seemed like the right mind for me."

Why did Lang think he could get along with Prada, when Jil Sander so spectacularly could not? Though Sander made no public statement about leaving Prada, her allies put out the word that she was unable to make the quality compromises that Bertelli's marketing demands imposed on her.

"I have no problem with him," Lang said. "We get along very well. He's a very strong personality, but they have the culture. A certain quality." He said he viewed the deal as a way of hanging on to his independence, rather than selling it.

Lang didn't want to talk about the American Fashion Awards, but he was too polite not to answer a direct question about why he hadn't shown up. The idea of being thought pretentious or rude pained him. "American people don't have the fear of being exposed," he began. "In Europe, they still respect the privacy of the artist. Here, when you have success, it's like you belong to the public. And, besides, we all know that certain awards they give you because they are on your side, and other awards they give you because it's politics. But, anyway, it doesn't matter, because I do want to play the game and help the industry."

Lang was born in Vienna in 1956. His parents divorced when he was five months old, and his sister stayed with his mother, who died some years later. Helmut was sent to live with his maternal grandparents, in Ramsau am Dachstein, a small village in the Austrian Alps. His grandfather was a shoemaker. Helmut lived in the attic of the house. (To this day, he lives only at the tops of buildings—his current residence is a duplex penthouse in NoHo.) He was lonely, and spent a lot of time up there by himself. One can feel the influence of the mountains in Lang's work, not so much in the actual outfits (although in his earliest collections the women wore what looked like lederhosen) as in the simplicity and functionalism of the design.

"In the mountains there was a very elegant way about basic necessities," Lang told me, "a great beauty in a certain way that is completely refined but not about money. Then money comes in and it gets over the top. People who grow up in the city don't have that sense of taste, they don't experience it as connected to a real life, to nature, as I did. I was really very lucky to have that experience, though I was perhaps unlucky that my parents' divorce and my mother's death made me have it."

The mountain idyll ended abruptly when Helmut was ten. His father remarried, and Helmut went back to Vienna. The next eight years were "the most unhappy period of my life," Lang has said. His stepmother forced him to wear suits and hats that had belonged to her father, a Viennese businessman. He had to wear them to school as well as around the house. Of course the suits didn't fit. "It was completely painful to have to wear these clothes," he said. "The other kids at school were dressing like hippies, but I was not allowed to wear jeans. My chance to find my style as a teen-ager, which is a very formative time, was taken away from me. I'm not completely sure, but maybe this is why I became a fashion designer. Because I was denied my own identity."

On the day Lang turned eighteen, in 1974, he told his parents he was leaving. He never saw either of them again. His father died several years ago, and he has lost track of his stepmother. When I asked if he ever thought of getting in touch with her, he said, "Why would I?" and added, "When I make a movie, it will be called 'The Stepmother.' "

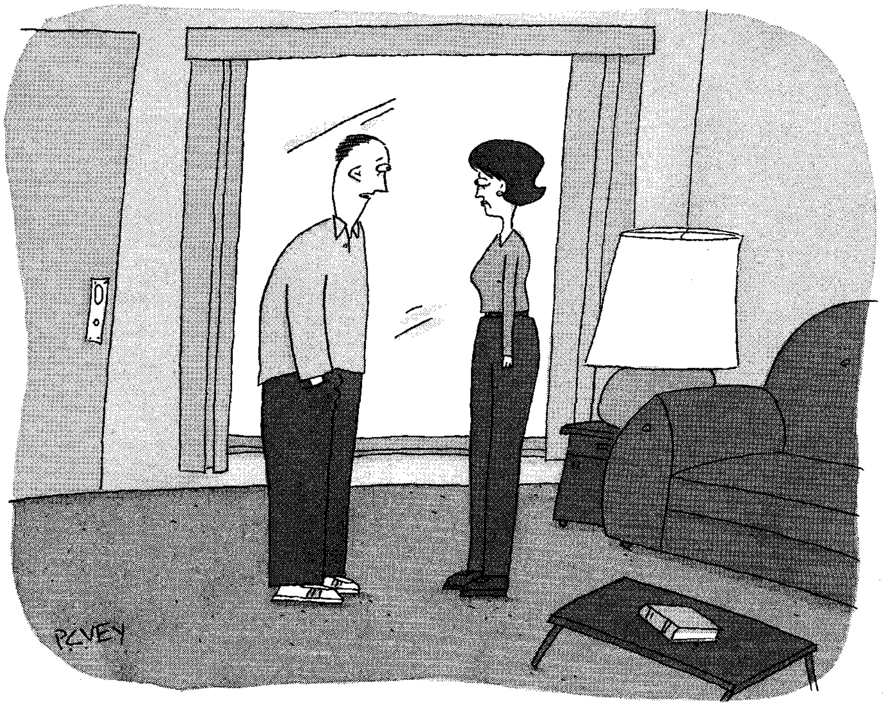
After leaving home, he lived in various apartments around Vienna, doing odd jobs. "I went through a two- or three-year period when I tried every different kind of style, trying to make up for lost time, but also looking for a uniform. Some were quite eccentric, some quite normal. For a while, I was mixing denim and made-to-measure. So, for example, I would wear an embroidered jacket with jeans." Casual American clothes, Lang said, had an extraordinary allure in Austria, where they were hard to obtain. "Eventually, I found myself wanting a certain cut of T-shirt and some off-white pants that I couldn't find in Vienna, so I decided to try to make them myself. I found some fabric and took it to a seamstress and explained what I wanted her to do." A few people liked the clothes and asked him if he could make T-shirts and pants for them. "I sold eight of each. And I was really happy, because I needed the money."

Lang gradually tried making more formal clothes. After a year and a half, he hired some seamstresses and opened a made-to-measure store. "I just learned from watching what people were doing and asking how it was done. Then I would ask what would happen if you turned the fabric inside out, or if we put the pocket over here and not over here. When you haven't the formal education of fashion school, you have the freedom to ask questions others might not ask." Running his own shop, he said, "was the best school I could have had. I was immediately thrown into the problems of making clothes for real people, and learning what their bodies were really like. Also, I had to pay for my mistakes." Word spread through Vienna of this marvellous man who could make any kind of clothes you wanted. The rich discovered Helmut, and he began making opulent ball gowns for Viennese ladies. "This was in the early eighties, when people wanted to show how much money they had." He closed the shop in 1984, and showed his first ready-to-wear collection in Paris in 1986.

During this period in his life, Lang became close friends with the German artist Kurt Kocherscheidt and his wife, the photographer Elfie Semotan. He frequently stayed with them and their two young sons at their place in the Austrian countryside. When I spoke with Semotan, she said her husband's influence on Lang was in "giving Helmut a method of working. Kurt would stay up late, listen to music, fall asleep, wake up, and work again. When he wasn't working, he would try keeping his head empty. Stay free-floating on the outside, watching for things. This is what Helmut has, and it is a gift. You let things pass in front of your eyes without interfering." When Kocherscheidt died of a heart attack, in the early nineties, Lang became a kind of father figure to the boys, Semotan said. "He was just always there. I have a picture in my mind of the youngest one literally leaning up against Helmut for support."

At his early shows in Paris, Lang established an avant-garde reputation with his use of techno fabrics. He made a shirt that changed color on contact with the skin, shiny metallic pants, and a rubber dress. Angie Rubini, who worked for Lang's public-relations agent in those days, said, "He had a real buzz around him, partly because he was Austrian and all the other European designers were French and Italian. Now you see Belgians, all sorts of nationalities, but Helmut was really the first from outside the usual crowd."

The recession of 1992, which followed the grunge movement, set the stage for Helmut's minimalist style. The eighties had been about showing money; the nineties were about hiding the money. Lang's secretive aspect perfectly suited the Zeitgeist. Anna Wintour said recently,



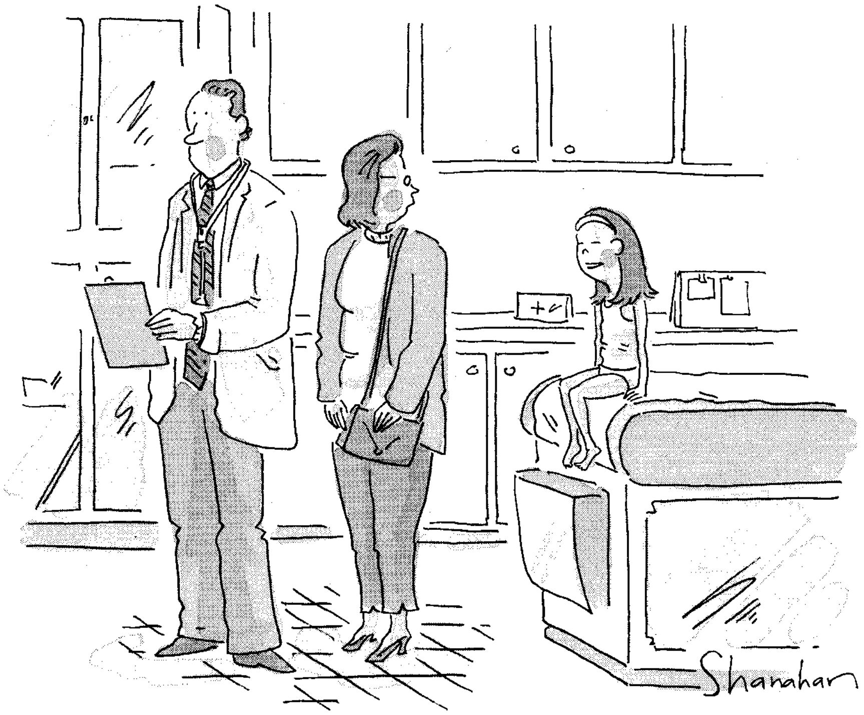
"I know I'm wrong, but I'm sure you can make me more wrong."

"Helmut came along and at first it was 'Wait a moment, what's this? This is not in the spirit of the mid-eighties,' which was all about opulence. But then everything crashed and fashion reflected that, and Helmut was there to take advantage."

By 1997, when Lang moved to New York, he was at a crossroads. The press loved him, his influence was everywhere. In launching his jeans line, in 1997, Lang more or less single-handedly rescued denim from the fashion wilderness. His dirty denim jeans of three years ago are now being copied by cK and SilverTab, a Levi's brand; his paint-spattered jeans have been knocked off by Banana Republic; and his raw denim is everywhere. Lacking the money to capitalize on his success, he had to watch as other designers appropriated his ideas for the mass market. "The amount of copying that goes on is outrageous," he said. "It isn't just our clothes—it is every part of our identity. The other day, I was in a cab and I saw a bag on the street and thought it was one of our bags, and then I saw another designer's name on it." A designer in this situation has three choices: he can take the company public, he can license his name to other manufacturers, or he can go into a partnership with an investor. At one time, Lang almost accepted an offer to be the head designer for the house of Balenciaga, once run by the famous Spanish couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga. But ultimately he decided on the joint venture with Prada.

There is a certain logic to Lang's Prada deal, but it also seems risky for him. Prada cultivates a style similar to Helmut Lang's—classic clothes, luxury sportswear, cutting-edge techno fabrics, and a love of uniforms—and their respective styles are getting closer all the time. Indeed, Prada seems to have already helped itself to a large portion of Helmut Lang's stripped-down aesthetic (Prada Sport is particularly Lang-like), and now that he's part of the family his innovations will be even more available. In a growing number of cases, the only significant difference between Lang's clothes and Prada's clothes is the price—Prada is more expensive, and this season Helmut Lang prices appear to have dropped by about twenty per cent across the board. This suggests that Helmut Lang could become an entry-level branch of Prada.

To better understand how Helmut Lang fits into the growing Prada empire, I met with Giacomo Santucci, a courtly man with close-cropped hair, who is the managing director of Helmut Lang. We met in a palatial town house just outside the center of Milan, which is serving as the showroom and temporary headquarters for Helmut Lang in Italy while more contemporary, loft-style headquarters are constructed. Santucci's office was almost empty of furniture, and the walls had been painted white. Space is an important part of Prada's image of luxury, and there is a lot of it around Prada offices and stores. As Santucci explained, at the time that Prada began to establish itself as a brand, in the eighties, the luxury stores were cluttered with goods. "There was wood, gold, brass in these stores," he said. "Prada understood that the shops actually had to look empty, with only a few products on display, to give more space and freedom to the individual shopper."



"Bobby Linderman—now, there's a doctor."

Prada, founded in 1913 by the grandfather of Miuccia Prada, originally made bespoke steamer trunks. Today, the Prada Group, like its two closest rivals, the luxury conglomerates LVMH and the Gucci Group, is a fashion company based on an accessories company. As Faye Landes, of Sanford C. Bernstein, explained to me, Wall Street likes these types of fashion businesses because cash flow is supplied by a regular sale of accessories rather than by the more erratic sale of clothes. "And it doesn't matter what size your body is," she said. "Anybody can buy a piece of the image of Prada by buying a bag." The clothes are like accessories for the accessories: at Prada, the brand sells the clothes, and not the other way around.

Such a business would not be possible without complete control of the Prada image, Santucci told me. The top two buttons of his Prada suit were buttoned, giving him the snug, vaguely militaristic look of the Prada man. (Around Prada, it's hard to tell the executives from the security force.) He paused to sip his espresso, dabbed his lips with a napkin, and continued: "If you look at the fashion business now, it is more about being a creative director than a designer. Prada didn't consider buying Jean Paul Gaultier, for example. He is an incredible designer, but if we had to be his partner we could not bring that much to the work, because we don't have the skills to manage that kind of work. We looked for brands that were very much in tune with our spirit."

In doing so, Prada is changing the meaning of the individual designer's role in creating fashion. "Before, the notion of creativity was linked to a designer, a designer with a very clear point of view," Santucci said. "Armani is definitely a designer. What he did twenty years ago he is doing now. He is very consistent. At Prada, the designer's role has evolved."

Lang had told me he had complete control over the image of Helmut Lang, but, listening to Santucci, it didn't sound that way. "Image is all-important to the marketing side, because it is something you can control," Santucci said. "Image is control. Image is not totally creative—it is also managerial." It seems as if the very attribute that makes Helmut Lang's image innovative and appealing, which is the separation between the man and the brand, also makes that image easier for Prada to control.

If there is any doubt about the diminished role of the individual designer in Prada's concept of fashion, it was dispelled at this year's spring-summer men's shows in Milan. In a press conference that Patrizio Bertelli gave right before the Jil Sander show, he said that he did not intend to hire another designer to replace Sander. "We are not looking for a designer, neither for the women's line nor the men's line. What's needed now in the fashion world is the role of art director, which is what Tom Ford does for Gucci." He added, "Tom Ford is not a real designer. He's just good at marketing. He's not like Karl Lagerfeld, who wakes up in the morning and sketches a dress." (In *Women's Wear Daily* a few days later, Tom Ford said, "Happily, I have never had the misfortune of waking up next to Patrizio Bertelli, so I haven't any clue how he knows what I do first thing in the morning.") When Bertelli was asked by Suzy Menkes, of the *International Herald Tribune*, what his wife's role was, art director or designer, he answered, "Miuccia I'd put somewhere in between." Menkes concluded by claiming that this development represented the end of fashion's "paternalistic structure for something more ruthless."

Back in New York, I asked Lang what he thought of Bertelli's comments. He said he did not take them very seriously, explaining that Bertelli liked to make outrageous statements to generate the press's interest. "You cannot replace the real person behind the name with a team and get the same result," Lang told me. "You can replace it and it might go on as before. It might be better able to fulfill the marketing goals without the artistic goals to stand in the way. But you could never go on with my personal voice if I was no longer here, no." Lang's slight smile seemed smaller and tighter than usual. "My personal voice cannot be replaced by a design group."

"Inspected by #16."

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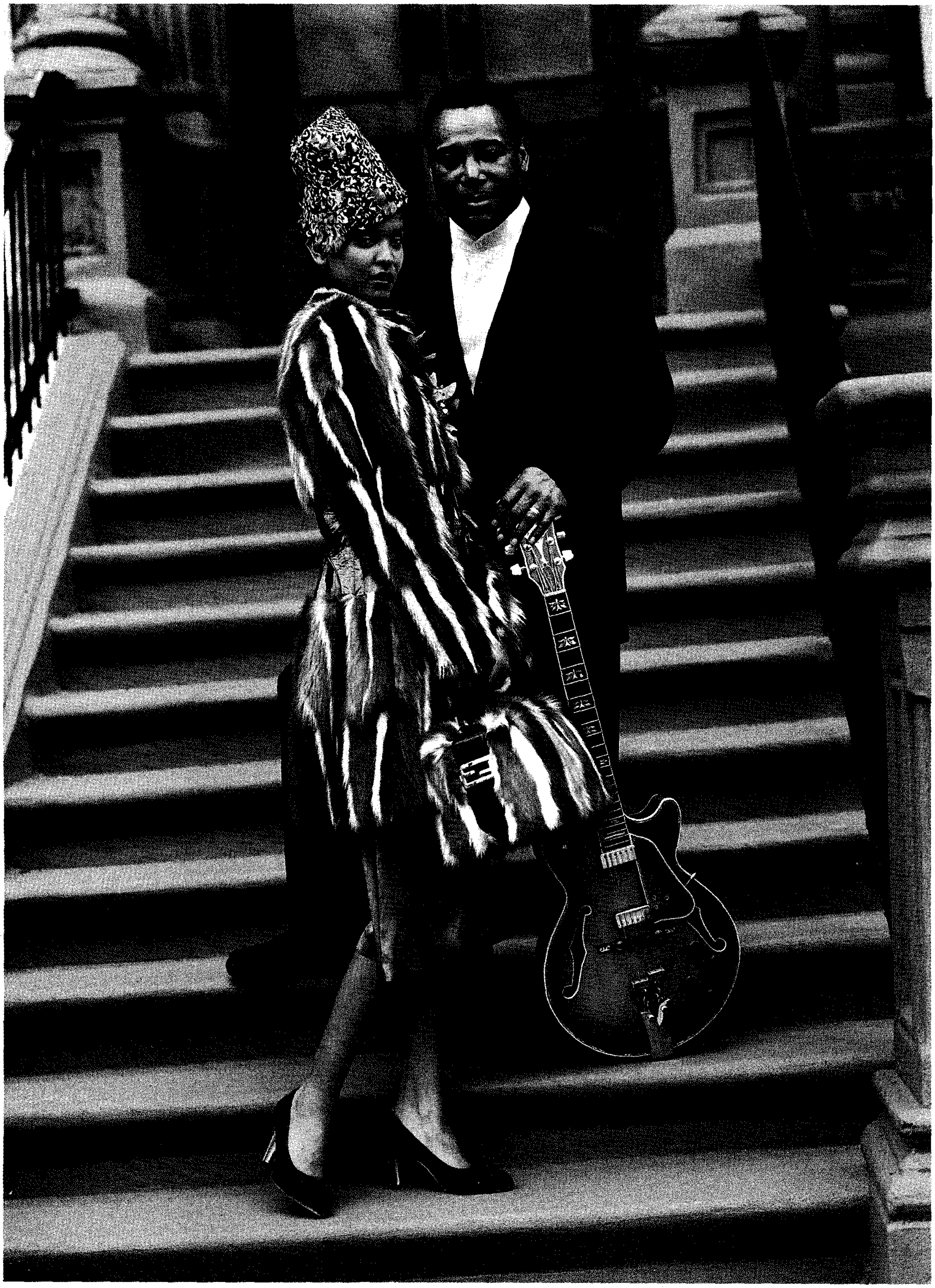
On a sultry day in August, the usual collection of people was hovering outside the second-floor showroom, all waiting for their right organic moment. Inside, Helmut Lang was supervising a fitting for a friend who was getting married the next day. He wore a tight, mottled gray T-shirt, his usual jeans, no socks, and the patent-leather shoes. The bridegroom and his best man were wearing white suits. Lang looked intently at the pant leg of the groom and instructed one of his assistants to pin it a little higher. The groom's hair was plastered at odd angles. He looked "broken" in the Helmut Lang mode. When Lang finished, he kissed the groom on the cheek and joined me.

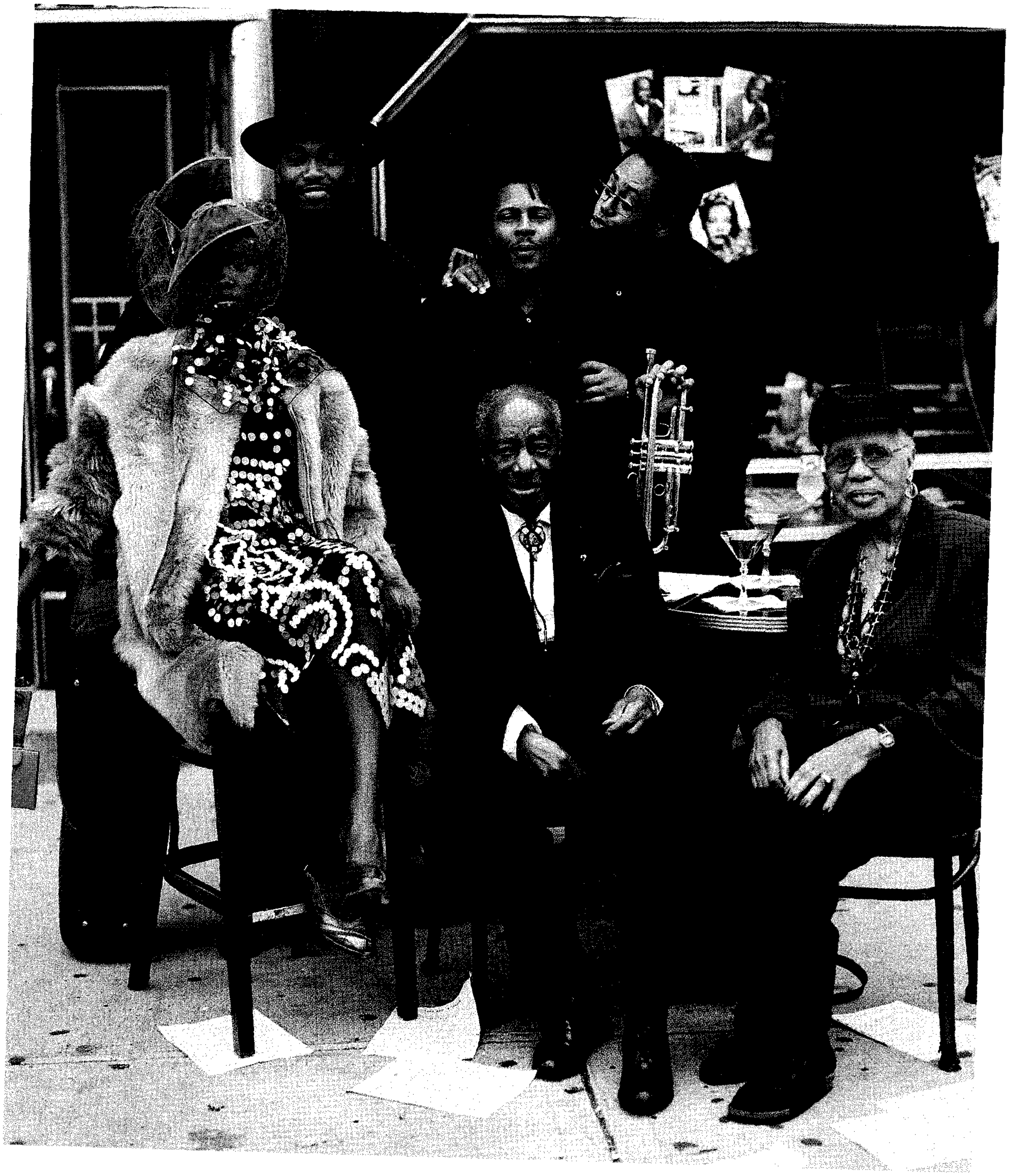
I followed him across the street, to look at what will be the new perfumery. The store will eventually have a laboratory, where people will be able to personalize their own scents by blending different oils, and a sales floor above, where items like toothbrushes and soaps will be sold along with the perfumes.

Pointing up Greene Street, Lang explained that his design studio would be moving a block north, to a space above the PaceWildenstein Gallery, later this fall, and that his press office would expand and take over the current building. He is also thinking of opening a made-to-measure store. There were some Con Ed workers up the street, wearing the orange safety vests that Lang made into a motif in several of his late-nineties collections. Once you had seen these vests in the store, you could not look at them on Con Ed workers without thinking of the orange in a fashion context—not necessarily a good thing. I was wearing a pair of Helmut Lang cargo pants that were several years old. Other designers' clothes often seem dated after a season or two, but not Lang's. In a sense, Helmut Lang has solved the problem of what to wear too well for his own good: when you've got a couple of his uniforms, you don't need to buy any more clothes.

Lots of people were around, but no one recognized Lang—the man dressed in T-shirt and jeans, describing his big plans for the neighborhood. He had told me earlier that what he likes about New York is that you can be at the center of things and still live as though you were in a village. Seeing him standing in the midst of his growing empire—the burgher of SoHo—it was as if he were rebuilding the Alpine village of his boyhood. I repeated something Louise Bourgeois had said about him: that he liked New York because he was a runaway. "But I don't feel like I'm a runaway anymore," he said. "I'm home." ♦



The guitarist George Benson and a model in Fendi's fur coat with bag. Opposite: The bass player Milt Hinton and his wife, Mona (sitting), with the saxophonist James Carter and the trumpeters Roy Hargrove and Jon Faddis. The model's fur is by Helmut Lang.



PORTFOLIO BY ARTHUR ELGORT

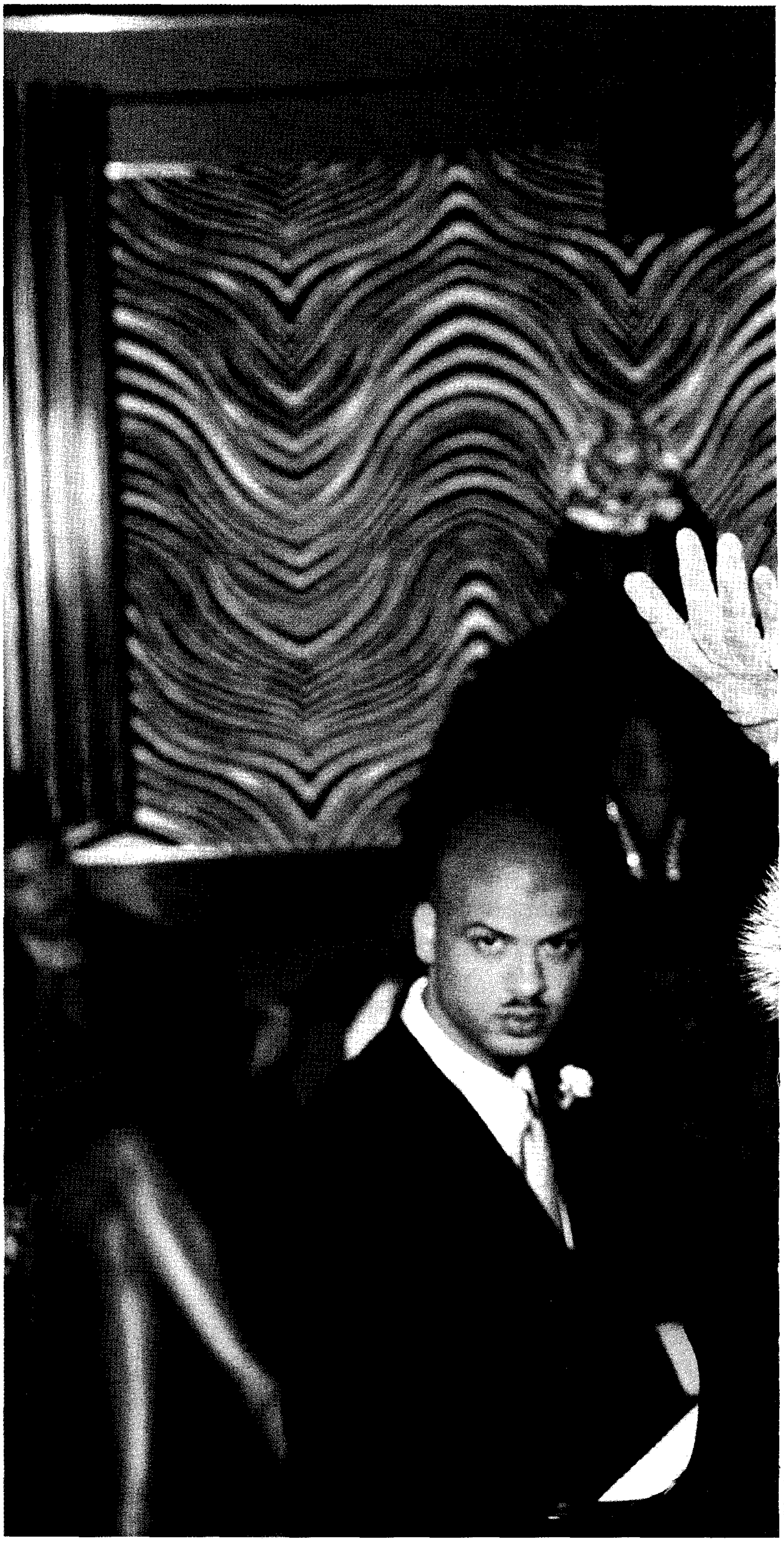
BEAUX JANGLES OF HARLEM

Just the other day, at twilight, on Frederick Douglass Boulevard: vestiges of old neon blink down on the taxis' lying "off-duty" lights and burn white squares into the sidewalk, and on the sidewalk itself children and their mothers and the guys some women call *dogs* walk in summer clothes, thin layers of perspiration coating cologne and Nivea. Some of the young women make fleshy mischief when you walk past them, but the older women, with close-cropped hair, dressed like their sons in bluejeans and oversized shirts, flash cameras as they pass a pair of young lovers clutching plastic roses wrapped in plastic and stuffed dogs from somewhere other than the old Times Square Playland, which doesn't exist anymore. The older women are amused by their younger counterparts; they pose them in front of Technicolor posters of Mary J. Blige or Tupac Shakur, with platinum, diamonds, and guns—real life. Later, you can catch the lovers—the couple with the roses and the tacky dogs—fighting over on Morningside, if it's late enough and they're exhausted enough by their expectations. The guy's shouting, "I'm your *boyfriend!* I thought I was your *boyfriend!*" and the girl, her face floating beneath an enormous roll of bangs, is caving in on herself, undone by her vulnerability, by his need, by his rage.

Over on 125th Street, the boys are getting off work at the Apollo, and a Japanese woman, alone, eats an ice-cream cone and gazes up at the newly refurbished, intellectually replenished Studio Museum in Harlem, its glass walls housing more history than she can imagine. Then there's the colored couple going to the last showing of "What Lies Beneath" at the new Magic Johnson Theatres, on 124th Street. They arrive for the movie as if it were a gala of some kind, the sneak preview of their lives: she's in silver, he wears a tux, and they saunter in with a kind of precise glamour you rarely see anymore. So many things have changed, and so many haven't: civilization still forces itself to put its best foot forward.

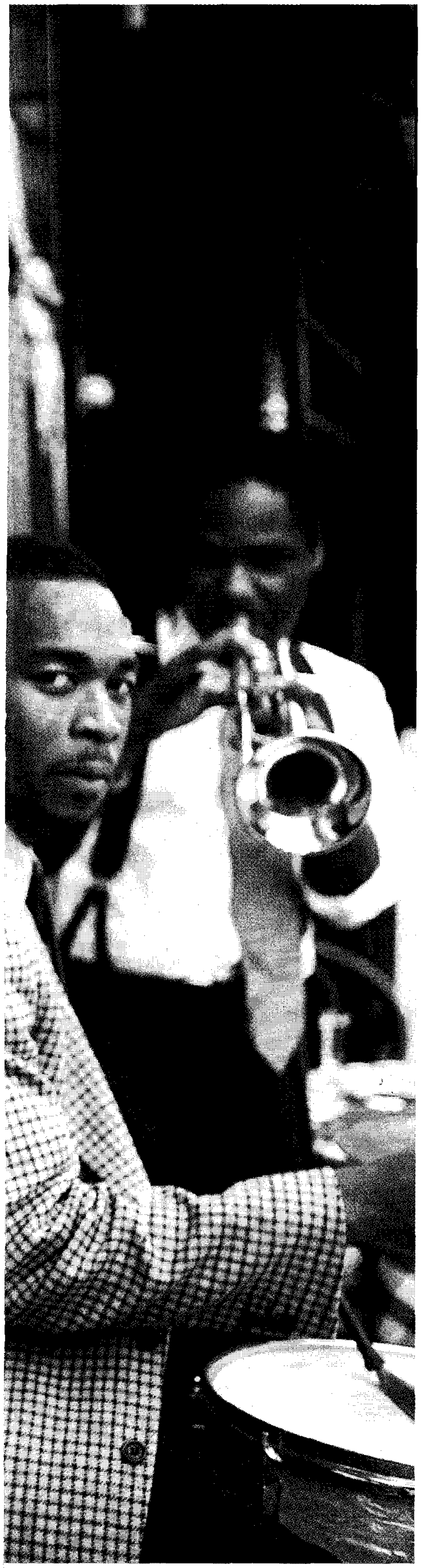
Anyway, there he is, traversing upper Broadway, a colored man dressed in a way that reminds passersby of the Harlem of the past: vest, jacket, spectacles with wire rims. People stare at him, and his mere presence makes them recall

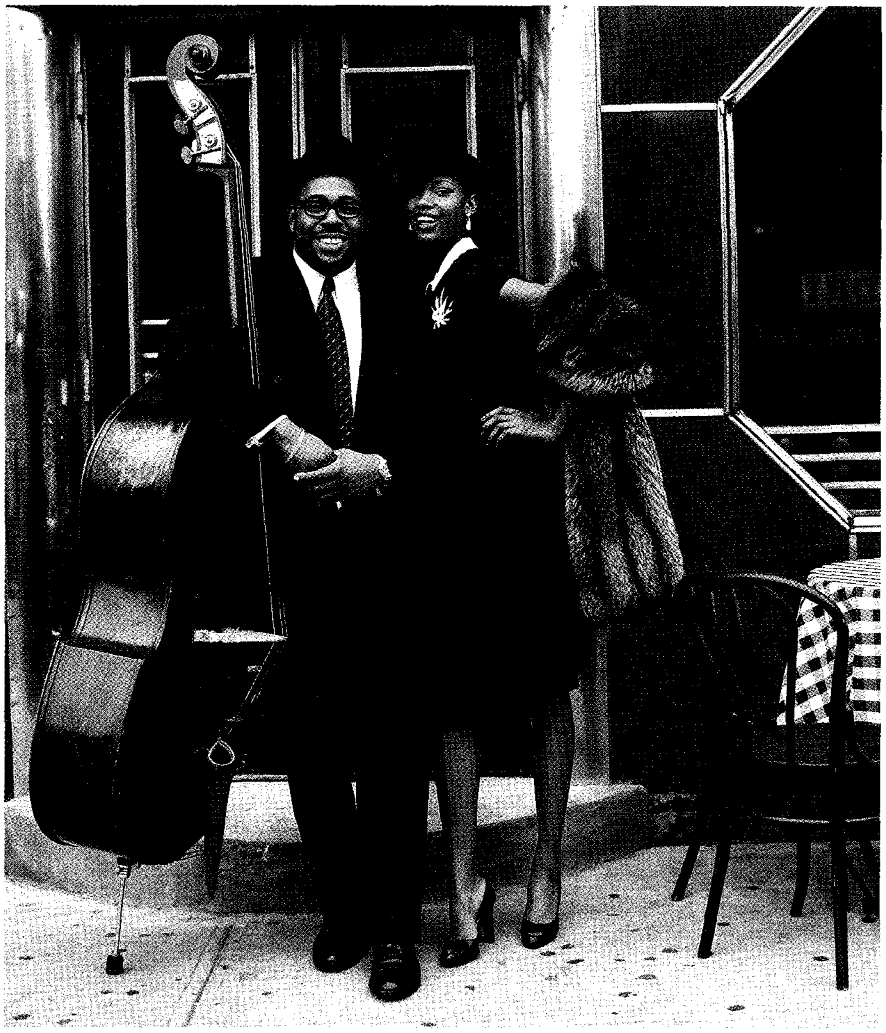
PREVIOUS PAGES, LEFT: SHOES, MANOLO BLAHNIK; HAT, EUGENIA KIM. RIGHT: DRESS, ALEXANDER MATTIEU; HAT, STEPHEN JONES; SHOES, PRADA.

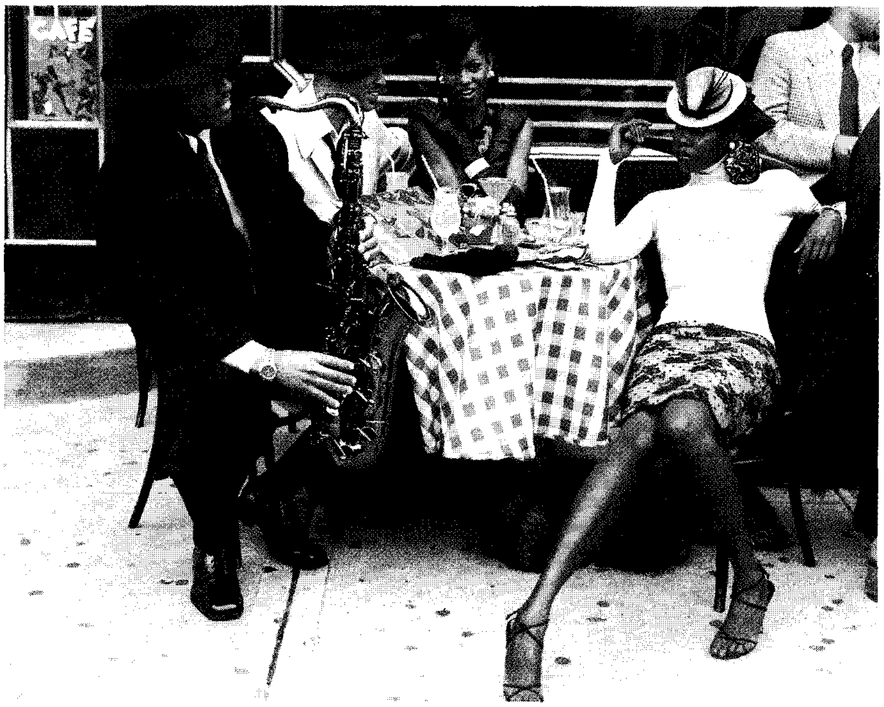


The pianist Jason Moran, in Giorgio Armani, at the Lenox Lounge. The model wears a Ralph

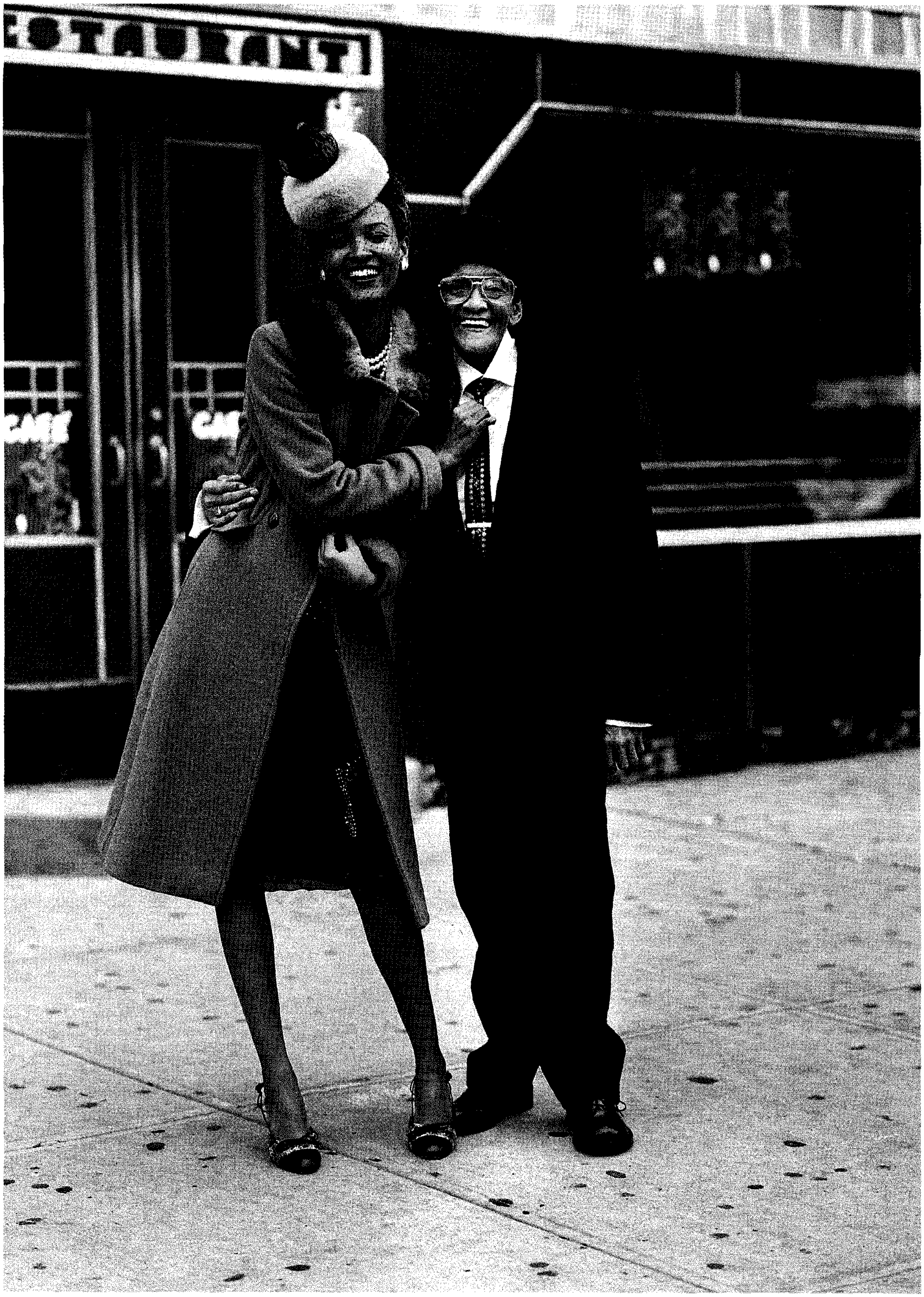
Lauren sequinned top and velvet skirt, a forties-style hat by Stephen Jones, a Michael Kors fox stole, and gloves by La Crasia.



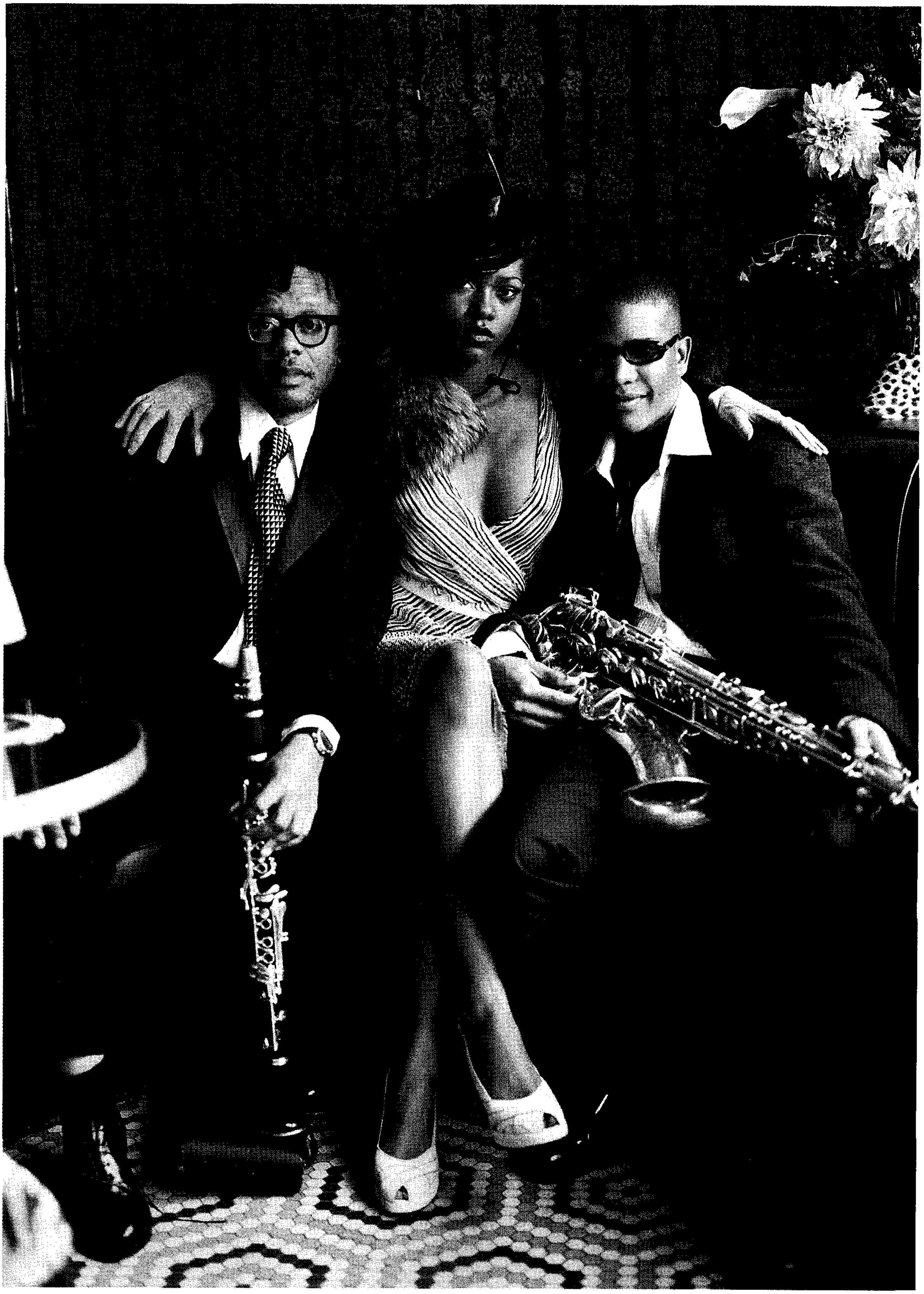




Left: Guitarist Mark Whitfield, drummer Eric Harland, and trumpeter Russell Gunn, with a model in a Prada fur suit and a James Coviello hat. Top: Bass player Christian McBride in a Cerruti suit, with a model in a Moschino dress and a fur stole by Michael Kors. Bottom: Saxophonist Craig Handy in a Yohji Yamamoto coat and pianist Jason Moran in a J. J. hat, with models in Lawrence Steele outfits.



The vocalist Jimmy Scott, with a model in a coat and dress by Alberta Ferretti, a Stephen Jones hat, and Manolo Blahnik shoes.



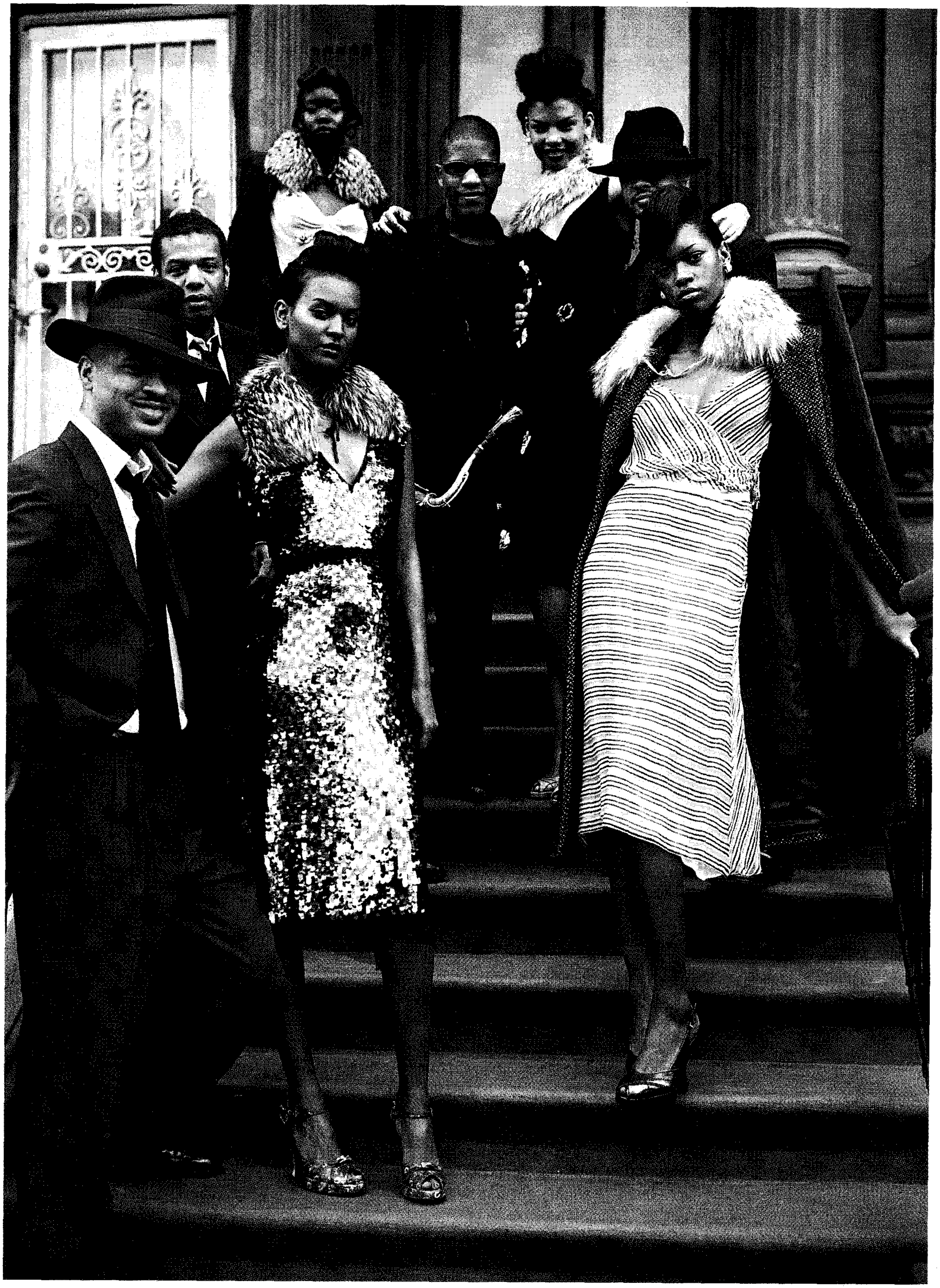
The clarinettist Don Byron and the saxophonist David Sánchez flank a model in an outfit by Prada and a James Coviello hat.

something they didn't realize they'd forgotten: the James Wong Howe vision of New York, or certain news photographs, like the one of Lena Horne standing at the window of the old Hotel Theresa in early-morning, post-performance light, in the nineteen-forties, when people lived in hotels and drank and were sentimental not just in song and didn't marry their lofts. This man, walking on Broadway, comes across a number of colored children, boys and girls with short hair and pigtails, respectively, tumbling out of a restaurant with a woman who appears to be their mother. And he's more than prepared for what, increasingly, has become a New York moment—children being rude because you're in their way—when two or more of them say, "Excuse us!" without a trace of irony. And that civility melds for a moment with the anachronism of the man's physical gentility. That kind of manners, just another aspect of the urban style, picked up and transmogrified from way back when, when your family came from somewhere else—well, they've become the last puff of a pipe dream, as old-fashioned as the ladies leaving church basements in Harlem, or black musicians wearing pinstripes.

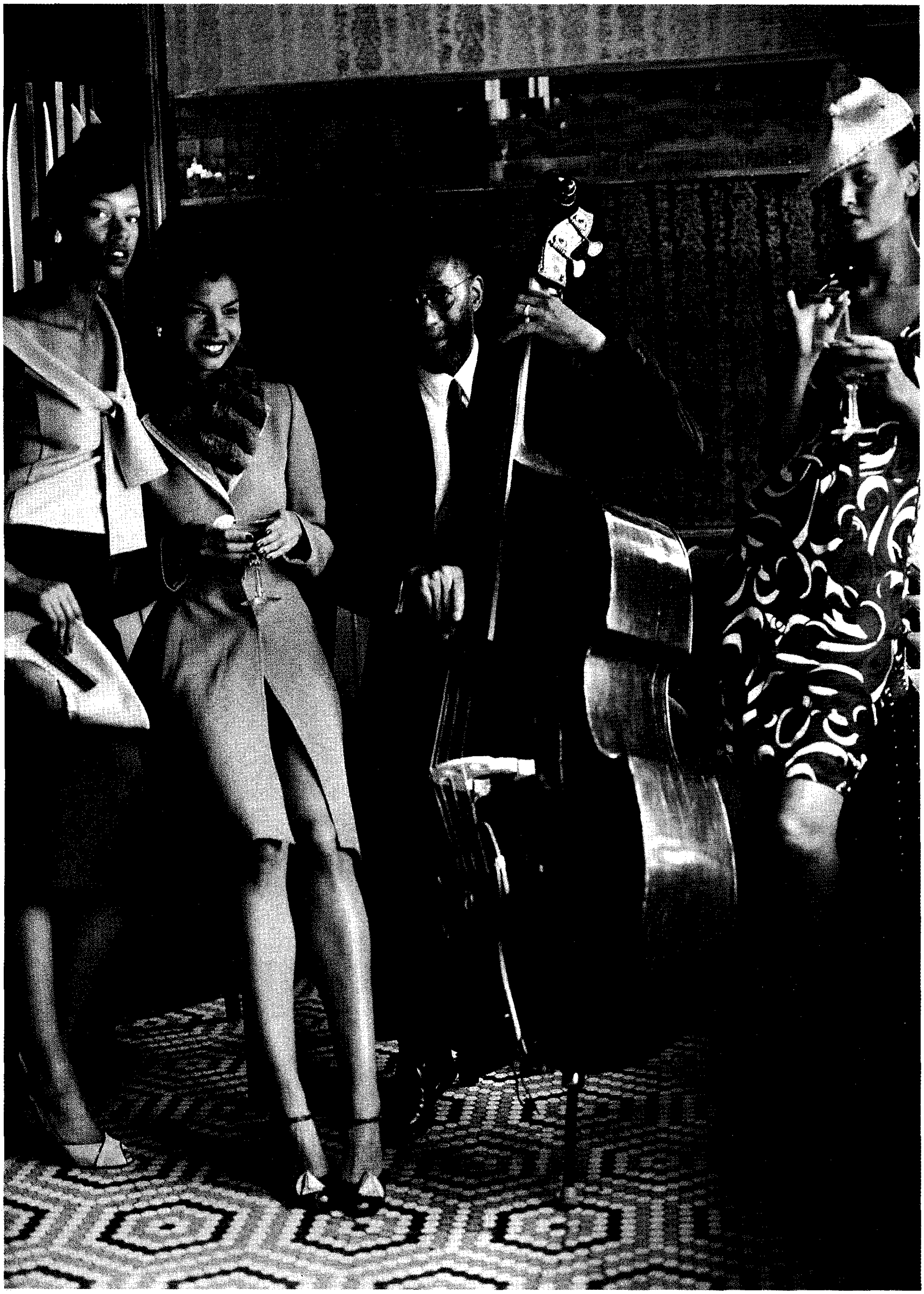
The world around this colored man is an urban prairie: low buildings and big skies that for the most part no one sees. The people here watch their backs instead, only slightly comforted by the recent wave of affection for "Harlem," the Harlem of the fabulous furs, of Tallulah Bankhead hanging out with Billie Holiday, of Helen Lawrenson stepping out of a big Checker on her way to visit her lover, the gangster Bumpy Johnson—grand lowlifes with high-class talent doing their bit for miscegenation. Because for a long time it wasn't that Harlem. It was a troubled and troubling place in the post-Harlem Renaissance years, the bad, funky depression years, when the neighborhood was bright with malice and broken glass and junkies' survival instincts. The post-Harlem Renaissance years lasted, well, until about now, and were written about with a certain air of survivor's guilt by Harlem's perennial prodigal James Baldwin, who got out in order to survive but couldn't survive the pull of those who didn't and who called him back to watch their deaths by poverty and obscurity. Besides Baldwin, few of the writers who've claimed the neighborhood over the years have stayed with us, and in a way it's not their fault. Pretty paltry stuff, words, next to the hubbub of Harlem, the unfashionable place it was and is no longer. No, it's in style now, especially among all those young professionals taking the No. 1 and No. 9 trains past midtown, eager to explore the noise and dirt and music and hair-weaving salons and bookstands and black nationalism and white money, because Harlem is what it is—a new old community waiting for those ambitious people to establish it again, a place that's most interesting without metaphor, the way the late writer Jervis Anderson chose to see it in his book "This Was Harlem," published in 1982, when he was among the first to tell us what was there, what was new and what was old, waiting to be unearthed and rediscovered, at a time when all most people wanted to hear was the tinny music of an unfortunate nostalgia.

—*Hilton Als*

JEWELRY, CLIVE KANDEL; HAT, STEPHEN JONES; SHOES, MANOLO BLAHNIK FOR CLEMENTS RIBEIRO.

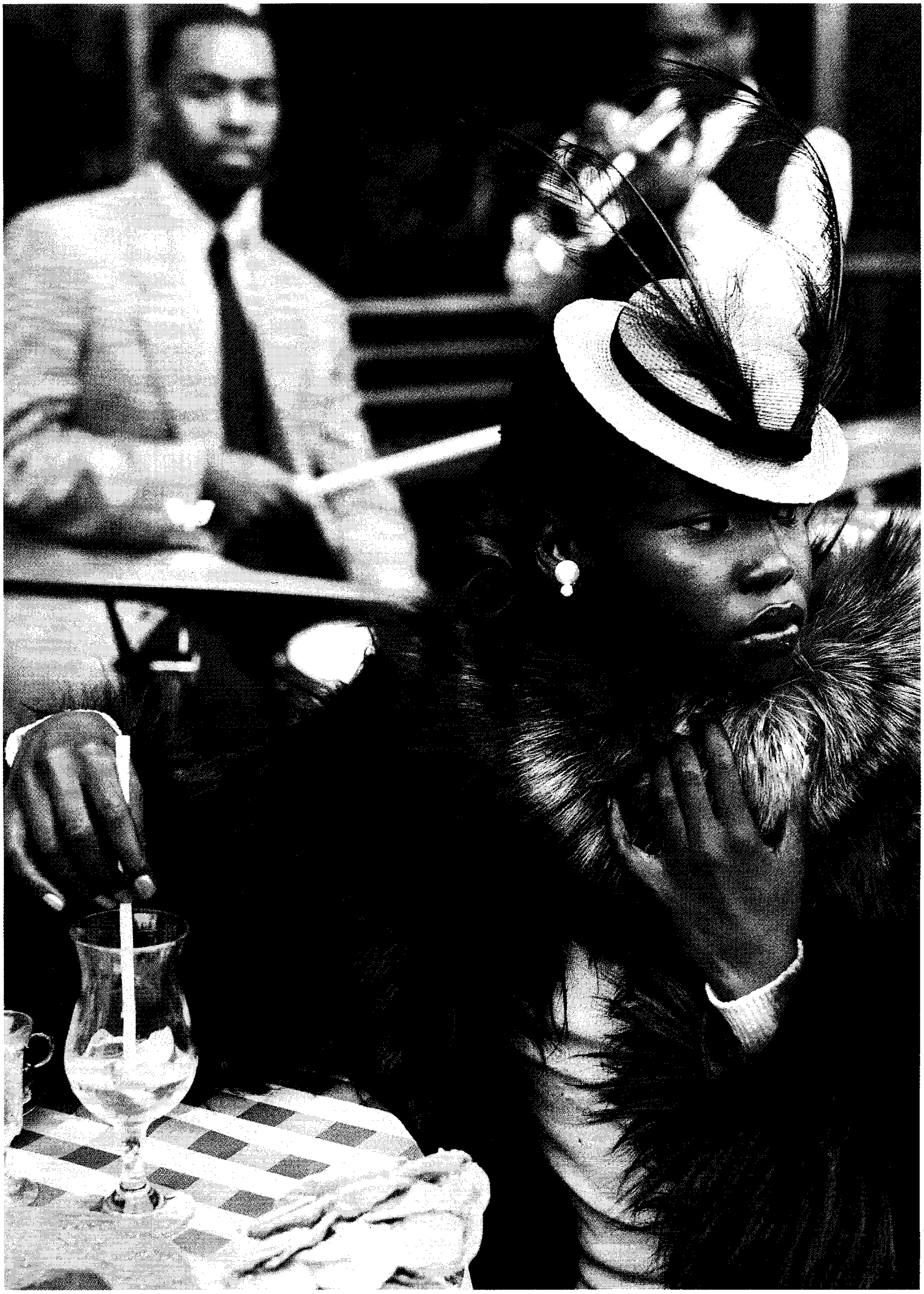


Left: The vocalist Jon Hendricks, with a model in a Michael Kors outfit. Above, from left: the pianist Jason Moran, the guitarist Mark Whitfield, the saxophonist David Sánchez, and the band leader Paul Ellington, with models wearing outfits by Prada.



PORTFOLIO: HAIR, CHRISTIAAN; MAKEUP, TINA TURNBOW FOR THE WALL GROUP; STYLING COORDINATOR, JENNIFER HITZGES.

The bass player Ron Carter, in Giorgio Armani, is at the Lenox Lounge with models dressed in Miu Miu from head to toe.



SWEATER, LAWRENCE STEELE; EARRINGS, CLIVE KANDEL.

The drummer Eric Harland and the trumpeter Russell Gunn with a model in a Michael Kors fox stole and a James Coviello hat.

ISSUES

BY RICHARD FORD

On the drive over to the Nicholsons' for dinner—their first in some time—Marjorie Reeves told her husband, Steven Reeves, that she had had an affair with George Nicholson (their host) a year ago, but that it was all over with now and she hoped he—Steven—would not be mad about it and could go on with life.

At this point they were driving along Carding Croft Road where it leaves the Perkins Great Woods and begins to border the Shenipsit reservoir, dark and shadowy and calmly mirrored in the late-spring twilight. On the right was dense young timber—beech and alder saplings in pale leaf, the ground damp and cakey. Peepers were calling out from the watery lows. Their turn onto Apple Orchard Lane was still a mile on.

Steven, on hearing this news, began gradually and very carefully to steer their car—a tan Mercedes wagon with hooded yellow headlights—off Carding Croft Road and onto the damp grassy shoulder so he could organize the information properly before going on.

They were extremely young. Steven Reeves was twenty-eight, Marjorie Reeves a year younger. They weren't rich, but they had been lucky. Steven's job at Packard-Wells was to stay on top of a small segment of a larger segment of a rather minute prefabrication intersection that serviced the automobile industry, and where a sudden alteration, or even the rumor of an alteration, in certain polymer-bonding formulas could tip crucial down-the-line demand patterns, and in that way affect the comfort zones of several meaningful client positions. His job meant poring over esoteric petrochemical-industry journals, attending technical seminars, flying to vender conventions, then writing up status reports while keeping an eye on the market for the benefit of his higher-ups. He had been a scholarship boy at Bates and studied chemistry, was the only son of a hard-put but upright lobstering family in Pemaquid, Maine. He had done well. His bosses at Packard-Wells liked him, saw themselves in him, and in him saw other attributes they never quite owned—blond and slender callowness, tending to gullibility, but also caution and a compact toughness. Sharp. It was his seventh year with the company—his first job. He and Marjorie had been married two years. They had no chil-

dren. The car had been his bonus two Christmases ago.

When the car eased to a stop, Steven sat for a minute with the motor running, the salmon-colored dash lights illuminating his face. The radio had been playing softly—the last of the news, then an interlude for French horns. Responding to no particular signal, he pressed the radio off, and in the same movement switched off the ignition, which left the headlights shining upon the empty countrified road. The windows were down to attract the cool spring air, and when the engine noise ceased the evening's ambient sounds were waiting. The small peepers. A sound of thrush wings fluttering in the saplings only a few feet away. The noise of something falling from a small distance and hitting an invisible water surface. Beyond the stand of saplings was the west, and through the darkened trunks the sky far away was still pale yellow with the day's light, though here on Carding Croft Road it was nearly dark.

When Marjorie said what she had just said, she had been looking straight ahead to where the headlights made a bright path in the dark. Perhaps she had looked at Steven once, but upon saying what she had said, she kept her hands in her lap and continued looking ahead. She was a pretty, blond, convictionless girl with small demure features—small nose, small ears, small chin, though with a surprisingly full-lipped smile, which she practiced on everyone. She was fond of getting a little tipsy at parties and lowering her voice and sitting on a flowered ottoman or a burl tabletop with a glass of something and showing too much of her legs or inappropriate amounts of her small breasts. She had grown up in Indiana, studied art at Purdue. Steven had met her in New York at a party while she was working for a firm that did child-focussed advertising for a large toymaker. He'd liked her bobbed hair, wispy features, translucent skin, and the slightly husky voice that made her seem more sophisticated than she was, and somehow convinced her she was, too. In their community, east of Hartford, the women who knew Marjorie Reeves thought of her as a bimbo who would not stay married to sweet Steven Reeves very long. His second wife would be the right wife. Marjorie was just a starter.

JOEL MEYEROWITZ/ARIEL MEYEROWITZ GALLERY

Marjorie, however, did not think of herself that way, but only that she liked men and felt happy around them and assumed Steven thought this was fine and that in the long run it would help his career to have a pretty wife no one could pigeonhole. To set herself apart and to take an interest in the community, she had gone to work as a volunteer at a grieving-children's center in Hartford, which meant all black. And it was in Hartford that she had had the chance to encounter George Nicholson and fuck him at a Red Roof Inn until they had both got tired of it. It would never happen again was her view, since in a year it had not happened again.

For the two or possibly five minutes now that they had sat on the side of Carding Croft Road in the still, cool evening, with the noises of spring floating in and out of the open window, Marjorie had said nothing and Steven had also said nothing, though he realized that he was saying nothing because he was at a loss for words. A loss for words, he understood now, meant that nothing which comes to mind seems very interesting to say as a next thing to what has just been said. He knew he was a callow man—a boy in some ways, still—but he was not stupid. He had taken Dr. Sudofsky's class on "Ulysses" at Bates, and come away with a sense of irony and humor and a conviction that true knowledge was a spiritual journey, a quest, not a storage of dry facts—a thing like freedom which you fully experienced only in practice. He had also played hockey and thought that knowledge and aggressiveness were a subtle and surprising combination. He practiced both at Packard-Wells.

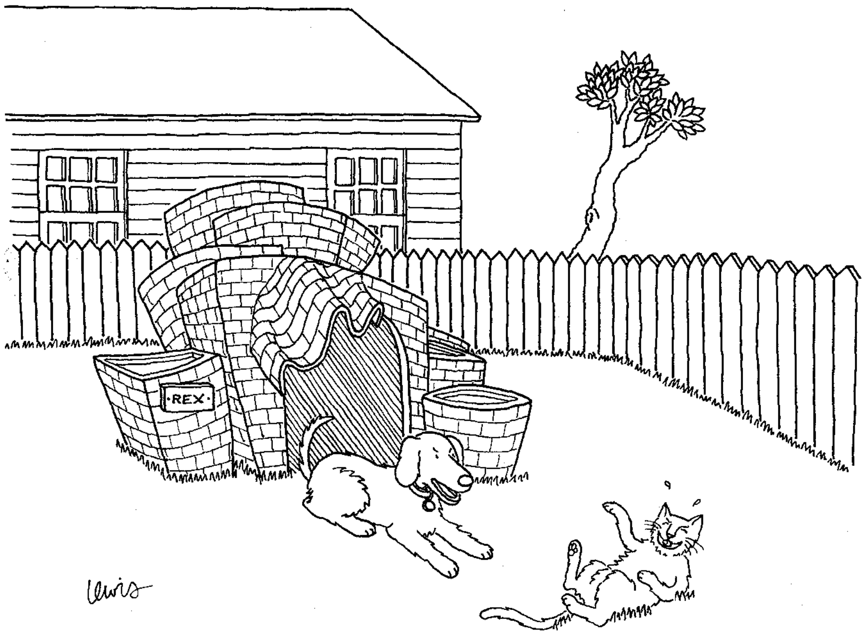
But for a brief and terrifying moment in the cool, padded semi-darkness just when he began experiencing his loss for words, he entered or at least nearly slipped into a hypnotic fuguelike state in which he began to realize and fear that he perhaps *could* not say another word; that something (work fatigue, shock, disappointment over what Marjorie had admitted) was at that moment causing him to detach from reality, to begin to slide away from the moment he was in, and in fact to lose his purchase and go crazy to the extent that he was in jeopardy of beginning to gibber like a chimp, or just to slip slowly sideways against the upholstered door and not speak for a long, long time—months—and then only with the aid of drugs be able merely to speak in simple utterances that would seem cryptic, so that eventually he would have to be looked after by his mother's family in Damariscotta. A terrible thought.

And so to avoid that—to save his life and sanity—he abruptly just said a word, any word that he could say into the perfumed twilight inhabiting the car, where his wife was obviously anticipating his reply to her unhappy confession.

For some reason the word—phrase, really—he uttered was "ground clutter." Something he'd heard on the TV weather as he and Marjorie were dressing for dinner.

"Hm?" Marjorie said. "What was it?" She turned her pretty, small-featured face toward him so that her pearl earrings caught light from some unknown source. She was wearing a tiny green cocktail dress and green satin shoes that showed off her incredibly thin ankles and slender bare, brown calves. She had two tiny matching green bows in her hair. She smelled sweet. "I know," Marjorie said, ignoring him, "this was not what you wanted to hear. But I felt I should tell you before we got to George's. The Nicholsons', I mean. It's all over. It'll never happen again. I promise you. No one will ever mention it. I just lost my bearings last year, with the move. I'm sorry." She had made a sharp little steeple of her fingertips as if she'd been concentrating hard when she spoke these words. But now she put her hands calmly in her minty green lap again. She had bought her dress especially for this night at the Nicholsons'. She had thought George would like it and Steven would, too. She turned her face away and exhaled a soft but detectable sigh in the car. It was then that the headlights went off automatically.

George Nicholson was a big squash-playing, thick-chested, hairy-armed Yale lawyer who sailed his own Hinckley-61 out of Essex and had started backing off from his high-priced Hartford plaintiffs' practice at fifty to devote more time to competitive racquet sports and senior skiing. George was a college roommate of one of Steven's firm's partners and had "adopted" the Reeveses when they moved into the community following their wedding. Marjorie had worked



"I guess cats just can't appreciate Frank Gehry."

with George's wife Patsy at the Episcopal Thrift Shop during their first six months in Connecticut. To Steven, George Nicholson had talked about a magical seasoning summer he'd spent hauling deep-water lobster traps with some tough old dogs out of Matinicus. Later, he'd been a Marine, had a faded tattoo of an anchor, ball, and chain on his forearm. Later yet, he'd fucked Steven's wife.

Having said something, even something that made no sense, Steven felt a sense of glum and deflated relief as he sat in the silent car beside Marjorie, who was still facing forward. Two thoughts had begun to compete in his reviving awareness. One was clearly occasioned by the thought of George Nicholson. He considered George Nicholson a gasbag but also a forceful man who had made his pile by letting little stand in his way. When he thought about George he always remembered the story about Matinicus, which put into his mind a picture of his own father and himself hauling traps somewhere out toward Monhegan. The reek of the bait, the sickening toss of the ocean in late spring, the consoling monotony of the solid bank of trees barely visible through the mists. Just thinking through that circuitry had made him vaguely admire George Nicholson, and, oddly, it made him think he liked George in spite of everything.

The other competing thought was that in Marjorie's character there had always been the impulse to confess upsetting things that turned out—he believed—not to be true; being a hooker for a summer up in Saugatuck; topless dancing while she was an undergraduate; heroin experimentation; taking part in armed robberies with her high-school boyfriend in Goshen, where she was from. When she told these far-fetched stories she would grow distracted, and shake her head, as though they were true. And now, while he didn't particularly think any of these stories was a bit truer, he did think that he didn't really know his wife at all; and that the entire conception of knowing another person, of trust, of closeness, of marriage itself was (while not exactly a lie because it existed *someplace* if only as an idea—in his parents' life, at least marginally), completely out-of-date, defunct, was something that typified another era, now unfortunately gone. Meeting a girl in New York, falling in love, marrying her, moving to Connecticut, buying a fucking house, starting a life with her and thinking you knew anything about her—the last part was a complete fiction, which made the rest a joke. Marjorie might as well have *been* a hooker or have held up 7-Elevens and shot people for all he knew about her. And what was more, if he'd said any of this to her, as she sat next to him, thinking he would never know what, she would either not have understood a word of it or simply would've said, "Well O.K., that's fine." When people talked about the bottom line, they weren't talking about money, they were talking about what this meant, *this* kind of fatal ignorance. Money—losing it, gaining it, spending it, hoarding it—all that was only an example, and a good one, of what was happening right now.

At this point a pair of car lights rounded a curve somewhere out ahead of where the two of them sat in their station wagon. The lights found both their staring white faces turned forward in silence. The lights also found a raccoon just crossing the road from the reservoir, headed for the woods that was beside them. The car was going faster than might have been evident. The raccoon paused to look up into the approaching lights, then continued on into the safe opposite lane. But only then did it turn and notice Steven and Marjorie's car stopped on the verge of the road, silent in the murky evening. And because of that notice it must've decided that where it had been was much better than where it was going, and so turned to scamper back across Carding Croft Road toward the cool waters of the reservoir, which was what caused the car—actually, it was a beat-up pickup—to rumble over it, pitching it spinning off to the side near the opposite shoulder. "Wooo-wooo-weee!" a man's voice shouted from inside the darkened cab of the pickup, followed by another man's laughter.

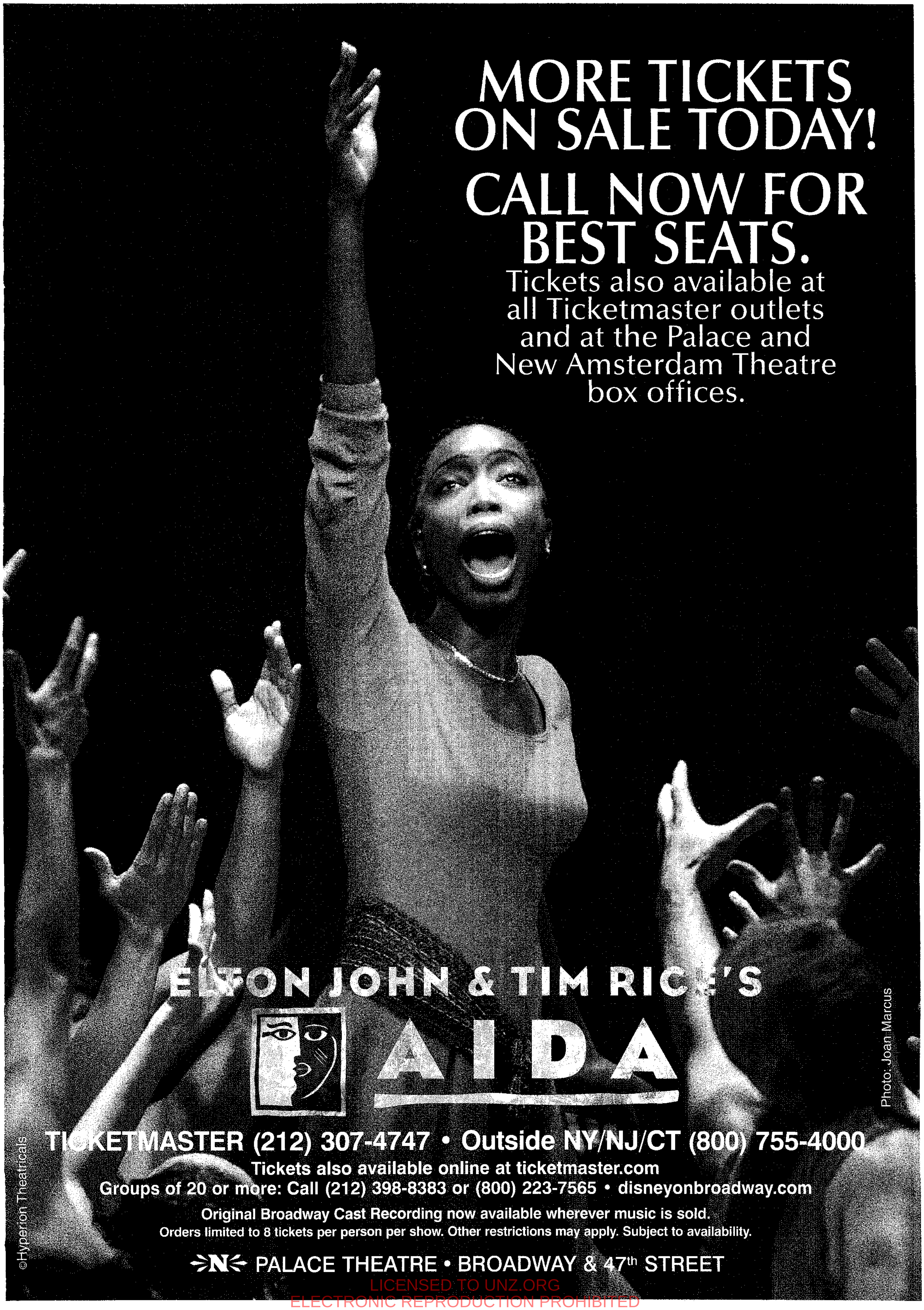
And then it was very silent again. The raccoon lay unmoving on the road twenty yards in front of the Reeves's car. It did not struggle. It was merely there.

"Gross," Marjorie said.

Steven said nothing. He felt less at a loss for words now. Indeed, his eyes felt relieved to fix on the stilled corpse of the raccoon.

"Do we do something?" Marjorie said. She was leaning forward a few inches to peer more intently at the raccoon through the windshield. Light was dying away behind the slender beech trees to the west of them.

"No," Steven said. These were his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first words—except for the words he took no responsibility for—since Marjorie had said what she had importantly said and their car was still moving toward dinner.

It was then that he hit her. He hit her before he knew he wanted to, but not before he knew he had done it. He hit her with the back of his open right hand without even looking at her, hit her straight in the front of her face, straight in the nose. And hard. In a way, it was more a gesture than a blow, though it was, he understood, a blow. He felt the soft tip of her nose, and then the knuckly cartilage against the hard bones of his fingers. He had never hit a woman before, and he had never even thought of hitting Marjorie, always imagining he *couldn't* hit her when he'd read newspaper accounts of such things in the lives of others. He had hit other people, been hit by other people plenty of times—tough Maine boys. Girls were out, though. His father always made that clear. His mother, too.

"Oh, my goodness," was all that Marjorie said when she received the blow, though she put her hand over her nose immediately and sat silently in the car while neither of them said anything. His heart was not beating hard. The back of his hand hurt a little. This was all new ground. Steven had a small rosy birthmark just where his left sideburn ended and his shaved face began. It resembled the shape of the state of West Virginia. He thought he could feel this birthmark now. His skin tingled there.

And the truth was he felt relieved, and did not feel at all sorry for Marjorie, sitting there stoically, making a little tent of her hand to cover her nose and staring ahead as if nothing had happened. He thought she would've cried, naturally. She was a girl who cried—when she was unhappy, when he said something insensitive, when she was approaching her period. Crying was natural. Clearly, though, it was a new experience for her to be hit. And so it called upon something new, and if not new then some strength, resilience, self-mastery normally reserved for other experiences.

"I can't go to the Nicholsons' now," Marjorie said almost patiently. She removed her hand and viewed her palm as if her palm had her nose in it. Of course it was blood she was thinking about. He heard her breath first through what sounded like a congested nose, then the breath was completed out through her mouth. She was not crying yet. And for that moment he felt not even sure he *had* smacked her—if it hadn't been just a thought he'd had, a gesture somehow uncommissioned.

What he wanted to do, however, was skip to the most important things, not get mired down in wrong, extraneous details. Because he didn't give a shit about George Nicholson or the particulars of what they had done in some shitty motel. Marjorie would never leave him for George Nicholson or anyone like George Nicholson, and George Nicholson and men like George Nicholson—high rollers with Hinckleys—didn't throw it all away for unimportant women like Marjorie. He thought of her nose, red, swollen, smeared with sticky blood dripping onto her green dress. He didn't imagine it could be broken. Noses held up. And, of course, there was the phone in the car. He could make a call to the party. He pictured the Nicholsons' great rambling white-shingled house brightly lit beyond the curving drive, the original elms exorbitantly preserved, the footlights, the low-lit clay court where they had all played, the heated pool, the Henry Moore out on the darkened lawn where you just bumped into it. He imagined saying to someone—not George Nicholson—that Marjorie was ill, had thrown up on the side of the road.

The *right* details, though. The right details to ascertain from her were, *Are you sorry?* (he had forgotten that Marjorie had already said she was sorry) and *What does this mean for the future?* These were the details that mattered.

Surprisingly, the raccoon that had been cartwheeled by the pickup truck and then lain motionless, a blob in the near-darkness, had come back to life and was now trying to drag itself and its use-

less hinder parts off the Carding Croft Road and onto the grassy verge and the underbrush that bordered the reservoir.

"Oh, for God's sake," Marjorie said, and put her hand over her damaged nose again. She had seen the raccoon's struggle and now turned her head away.

"Aren't you even sorry?" Steven said.

"Yes," Marjorie said, her nose still covered as if she wasn't thinking about the fact that she was covering it. Probably, he thought, the pain had already gone away. It hadn't been so bad. "I mean no," she said.

He wanted to hit her again then—a second time. This time in the ear. But he didn't. He wasn't sure why not. No one would ever know. "Well, which is it?" he said and felt for the first time really furious. The thing that made him furious—all his life, the very maddest—was to be put into a situation in which everything he did was wrong. When right was no longer an option. Now felt like one of those situations. "Which is it?" he said again angrily. "Really." He should just take her to the Nicholsons', he thought, swollen nose, bloody lips, all stoppered up, and let her deal with it. Or let her sit in the car, or start walking the 11.6 miles home. Maybe George could come out and drive her in his Rover. These were only thoughts, of course. "Which is it?" he said a third time. He was stuck on these words now, on this bit of barren curiosity.

"I was sorry when I told you," Marjorie said, very composed. She lowered her hand from her nose to her lap. One of the little green bows that had been in her hair was now resting on her bare shoulder. "Though not very sorry," she said. "Only sorry because I had to tell you. And now that I've told you and you've hit me in my face and probably broken my nose, I'm not sorry about anything—except that. And I'm sorry about being married to you, which I will remedy as soon as I can." She was still not crying. "So *now*, will you as a gesture of whatever good there is in you, get out and go over and do something to help that poor injured creature that those motherfucking rednecks maimed with their motherfucking pickup truck and then, because they are pieces of shit and low forms of degraded humanity, laughed about? Can you do that, Steven? Is that in your range?" She sniffed back hard through her nose, then expelled a short, deep, and defeated moan. Naturally her voice seemed more nasal, more Middle Western even, now that her nose was congested.

"I'm sorry I hit you," Steven Reeves said and opened the car door onto the silent road.

"I know," Marjorie said in an emotionless voice. "And you'll be sorrier."

When Steven had walked down the empty macadam road in his tan suit to where the raccoon had been struck and then bounced over onto the roadside, there was nothing now there. Only a small circle of dark blood he could just make out on the nubbly road surface and that might have been an oil smudge. No raccoon. The raccoon with its last reserves of savage, unthinking will had found the strength to pull itself off into the bushes to die. Steven peered down into the dark, stalky confinement of scrubs and bramble that separated the road from the reservoir. It was very still there. He thought he heard a rustling in the low brush where a creature might be, getting itself settled into the cool grass and damp earth to go sleep forever. Someplace out on the lake he heard a young girl's voice, very distinctly, laughing. Then a car door closed farther away. Then another sort of door, a screen door, slapped shut. And a man's voice saying "Oh no, oh-ho-ho-ho-ho, no." A small white light went on farther back in the trees, where Steven had not known there was a house. He wondered how long it would be before his angry feelings stopped mattering to him. He considered briefly why Marjorie would admit all this to him now. It seemed so odd.

Then he heard his own car start. The muffled-metal diesel sound of the Mercedes. The lights came smartly on and disclosed him. Music was instantly loud inside. He turned just in time to see Marjorie's pretty face illuminated, as his own had been, by the salmon dashboard lights. He saw the tips of her fingers atop the arc of the steering wheel, heard the sudden surge of the engine. In the woods to the west he noticed an odd glow coming through the trees, something yellow, something out of the low, wet ground, a mist, a vapor, something that might be magical. The air smelled sweet now. The peepers stopped peeping. And then that was all. ♦

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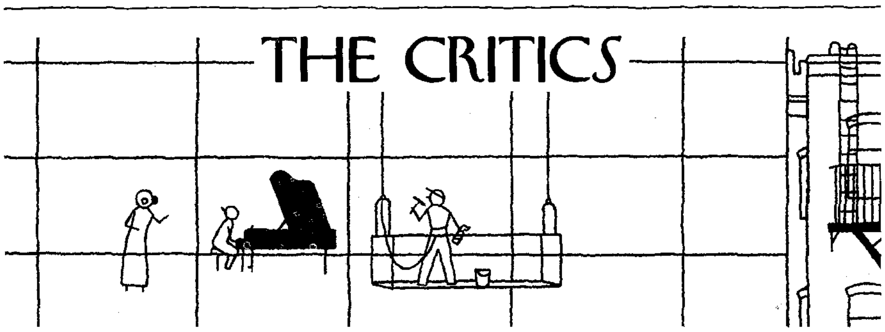


BOOKS

LOVE AND LOSS ON ZYCRON

A science-fiction tale within a love story within a family saga.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

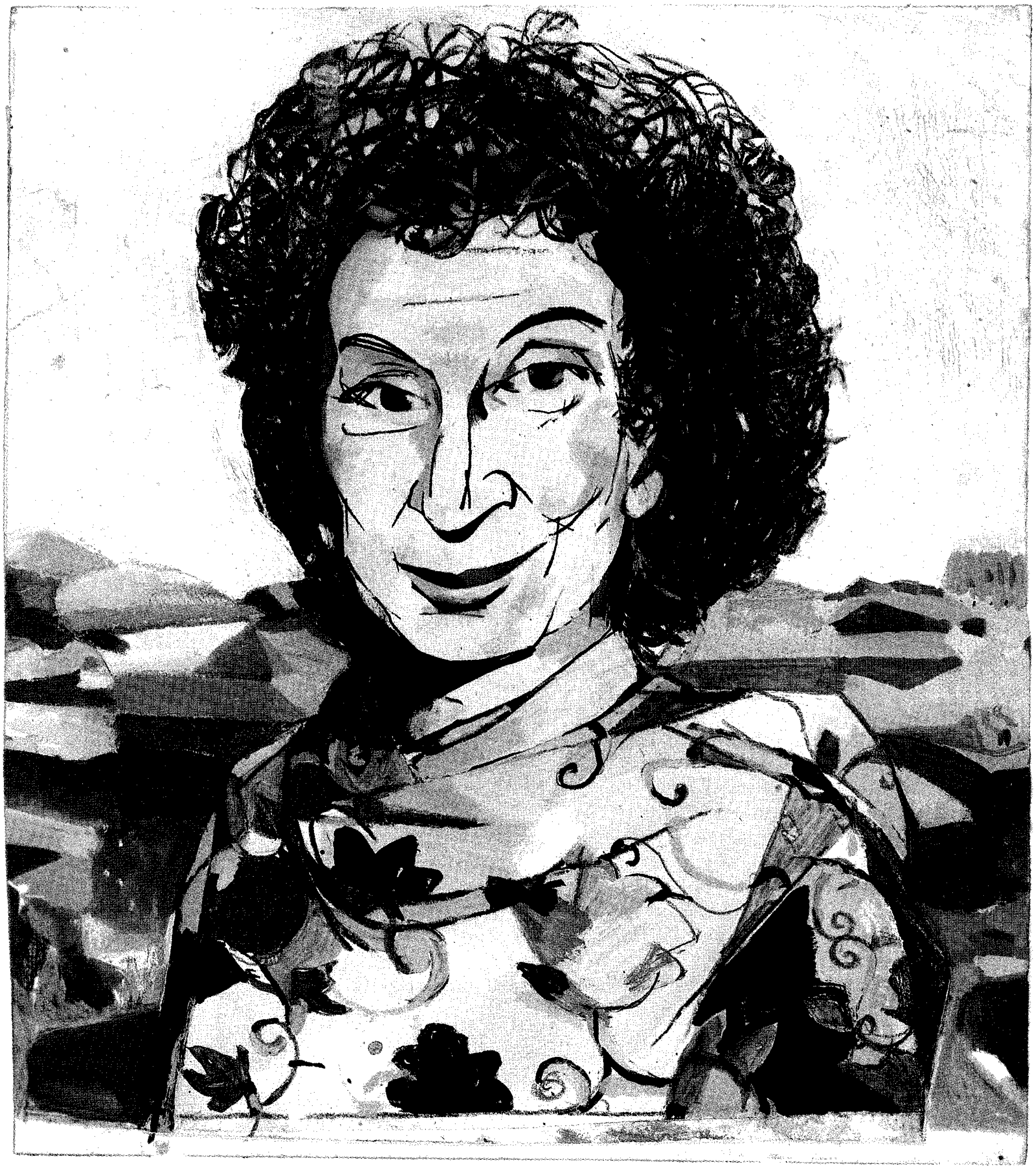
Margaret Atwood's opulent, tortuous new novel, "The Blind Assassin" (Doubleday; $26), moves its narrative forward on five levels:

1. Iris Chase Griffen, born in 1916 and failing of a weak heart in the late nineteen-nineties, sets down an account of her present daily existence—the weather, the television, her short but adventurous walks in and around the small Canadian city of Port Ticonderoga, where the button factory founded by her grandfather now houses a set of shops and boutiques. She frequently walks there and has an unsatisfactory snack at the Cookie Gremlin, noting how a cookie is "huge, the size of a cow pat, the way they make them now—tasteless, crumbly, greasy," or at a doughnut shop where an orange cruller looms as "a great wodge of flour and fat, spreading out through my arteries like silt." Her appetite is lessening.

2. She also relates, from start to near finish, her life, beginning as the elder of two granddaughters of the town's leading factory owner, and spending a cloistered childhood in the rustic family mansion, Avilion. Her father, Norval Chase, is the eldest of three brothers, and the only one to survive the First World War, from which he returns with one eye and a bad leg and a habit of drink; her mother is a delicate do-gooder who dies when Iris is nine, of a miscarriage. Iris and her younger (by three and a half years) sister, Laura, are basically raised by the housekeeper, Reenie, who hails from "a row house on the southeast bank of the Jogues, where the factory workers lived." Reenie is full of tough love and down-to-earth sayings like "No flowers without shit." Tutors come and go in the house, and the father is distracted by business, philandering, and his memories of the war, which has left him an atheist. The girls grow up semiwild. At the age of eighteen, Iris is consigned to marriage to the sleek, rising man Richard Griffen, who in the bargain takes over the button factory, which has been foundering in the Depression. Iris endures a loveless but posh marriage in Toronto up to and through the Second World War, bearing one child, Aimee. Laura, who has inherited her mother's idealism and has "a heightened capacity for belief" that beckons her to sainthood, is expelled from school and keeps disappearing into the sick wards and soup kitchens of the underprivileged until, in the novel's first paragraph, she drives her sister's car off a bridge into a ravine, where it bursts into flames. This catastrophe is the central event around which Iris's diaristic memoir circles.

3. A separate narrative within this long novel (also titled "The Blind Assassin") tells, in a telegraphic, present-tense, quotation-markless style, of an affair between a nameless hero and heroine, she of the upper classes and he a scruffy, though educated and comely, man on the run, with Communist connections. He bears a plain resemblance to a character in Iris's reminiscences, Alex Thomas, a swarthy European war orphan adopted by a Presbyterian minister, and a recent dropout from divinity school. The brief, Jean Rhysian novel was published in 1947, as a posthumous work by Laura Chase; Iris arranged its publication, an event with repercussions in her life story. It is published here, in the unbrief novel signed by Margaret Atwood, in clumps of short chapters alternating with Iris's autobiographical narrative.

4. As the two lovers meet in a succession of tawdry but fondly described borrowed rooms and apartments in Toronto, the hero, who is a science-fiction writer as well as a socialist fugitive, spins, to amuse and entrance his beloved, a tale of the planet Zycron, whose most glorious city is Sakiel-Norn. There, amid fountains and flowers and singing birds, the aristocrats, the Snilfards, wear masks of woven platinum and "a silk-like cloth made from the cocoon of the *chaz* moth," and prey on the Ygnirods, the "smallholders, serfs, and slaves." Sakiel-Norn is renowned for its fine carpets, which are fabricated by slave children who "go blind by the age of eight or nine." Once blind, they are compelled to be prostitutes, picklocks, or assassins. A blind assassin is hired to kill one of "the Goddess's maidens"—nubile girls from Snilfard families who are ritually sacrificed every year. Since some of them, having lost faith in the presiding religion, have been shrieking or even trying to bite the King as he acts as High Priest in this throat-cutting ritual, the practice has grown up of cutting out their tongues well before the sacrifice. The blind assassin, when he caresses the mute prisoner, falls in love with her. Together they escape Sakiel-Norn, and are captured by hostile barbarians who call themselves the People of Joy and are called by their enemies the People of Desolation. This extraterrestrial fantasy parodies the lovers' social situation and, doubly nested in the novel within the novel, radiates outward through the book's realistic levels, making them glow. Atwood, as she showed in the futuristic "Handmaid's Tale," is a dab hand at science fiction. Here, Zycron is out of this world's time but echoes, as the often interrupted narrator explains, ancient earthly history—the Hittites, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi. Thus the tale extends the novel's general indictment of what (the novel reminds us) de Maupassant called *L'histoire, cette vieille dame exaltée et menteuse*—that an-



The Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's new novel covers a spacious terrain of incidents, inventions, and moments.

RICCARDO VECCHIO

cient dame exalted and false. History, embodying "the ill will of the universe," is the ultimate blind assassin, a vast repository of cruelties and annihilations.

5. Interspersed among chapters of the secondary "Blind Assassin" are press clippings, mostly from Toronto newspapers, detailing various Chase-family events: marriages, births, costume balls, speeches. Before the novel has gone twenty pages, three violent events are reported: in 1945, Laura's "accidental death" by automobile; in 1947, Richard Griffen's death, supposedly from a cerebral hemorrhage; in 1975, Aimee Griffen's death, from a broken neck suffered in a fall in her home, at the age of thirty-eight, after a "lengthy struggle with drug and alcohol addiction." These abrupt dispensations of fate create a mystery novel's suspense. The clippings, which arrive out of thin air, generally run ahead of Iris's narrative, and we wait for more than five hundred pages for her to catch up and explain everything.

Atwood's maze should be allowed its turns and surprises, which unfold cunningly, and at (too much?) leisure. The attentive reader may guess some secrets before they are revealed; others are never

"Touch that dial, Meatball, and I'll have Paulie pop ya before we hit the tunnel!"

• •

revealed completely, as is the way with reality. A nagging sense of gimmickry, amid all these spinning wheels of plot, accompanies our awed and often delighted awareness of Atwood's mastery of period detail, of costume and setting, of landscape and sky, of odor and texture and mood and voice as this dwindling family floats down the twentieth century's dark river. Though North American in its gloomy ambition (saying No in Ontario thunder), the novel has a lively English talkiness and nimble ease with social nuance; the character of Reenie—her dour demotic idiom, her stubborn loyalty to her employers and the lonely Chase sisters—is given heroic lineaments. Two other female characters not yet mentioned make vivid impressions from their vanished time: Richard's sister Winifred Griffen Prior, a breezy young society matron, right-wing and ruthless, when Iris falls into her clutches, and Callista Fitzsimmons, a left-wing artist who enters the Chases' lives as the sculptress of a First World War memorial that Norval Chase insists on imposing on Port Ticonderoga, though its figure of the Weary Soldier is thought to be too downbeat. She becomes her patron's mistress—taking him to roadhouses racily frequented by American rumrunners laying in supplies of legal Canadian liquor—and she introduces Alex Thomas into the Chase girls' lives. She is a vision of twenties bohemian chic, striding about and shaking hands like a man, smoking cigarettes in a short black holder. Iris recalls, "She had pierced ears, and her red hair (done with henna, I now realize) was wound around with scarves. She wore flowing robe-like garments in bold swirling prints: fuchsia, heliotrope, and saffron were the names of the colours. She told me these designs were from Paris, and were inspired by White Russian émigrés." Winifred, who takes over her teen-age sister-in-law's social education, favors green, wears shrimp lipstick, has a low "whisky voice," and extends the lean flapper look into the next decade: "I watched her move through the rippling pastel space of the Arcadian Court as if gliding, with little nods and tiny calibrated waves of the hand. The air parted before her like long grass; her legs did not appear to be attached to her hips, but directly to her waist; nothing joggled." These zestful fashion notes are made by an author born in 1939: the bulk of this novel's realistic action occurs in what to her is history. The reader's last surprise is a Hydra-headed page of acknowledgments at the end, listing a formidable number of assistants and researchers, four editors, and three agents: minions of the Atwood industry.

In the book's spacious terrain of incidents, inventions, and moments, three areas stand out as heartfelt: the disconsolate solidarity of two sisters growing up in a big house with a dead mother and a non-communicative father; the wary, at times hostile dialogue of impassioned lovers hemmed into a narrow, secret space and prevented from making full self-bestowals; and the brave, humorous tenacity of an elderly woman moving doggedly through her memories, the changing streets of her home town, and a succession of ironically beautiful, eternally youthful days, toward the imminent end. Atwood is a poet—thirteen collections' worth—as well as a contriver of fiction, and scarcely a sentence of her quick, dry yet avid prose fails to do useful work, adding to a picture that becomes enormous. Images on the edge of the fantastic vivify spiritual conditions. Returning from a winter walk, the two girls "held hands and our mittens froze stuck together, so that when we took them off there were two woollen hands holding on to each other, empty and blue." Laura, after a long absence, looks translucent to Iris, "as if little spikes of light were being nailed out through her skin from the inside, as if thorns of light were shooting out from her in a prickly haze, like a thistle held up to the sun."

Canada is blessed to have two such distinguished, large-minded writers as Atwood and Alice Munro. Munro, though the less ingenious and wittily cerebral of the two, and less prone to extensive constructions, does give the impression of being the more thoroughly invested in her creations and the more open, in Chekhovian fashion, to unpredictable character developments. Some of the characters in "The Blind Assassin," such as the haunted war veteran and his wistfully fading wife, have a faint dusty savor of the stockroom; they are animated, as E. M. Forster said of Dickens' characters, by the author's own vitality, "so that they borrow his life and appear to lead one of their own." The two Griffen siblings are absolute villains, right out of Dickensian melodrama. And several minor aspects of the brilliant novel within the novel troubled me. It is described as having been published in New

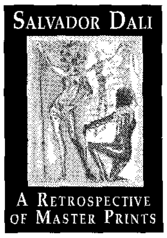
York City in 1947, to modest acclaim; yet, hard as it may be to believe now, no commercially published novel of that time—not Erskine Caldwell, not Steinbeck, not James M. Cain, not Edmund Wilson's officially banned "Memoirs of Hecate County" (1946)—could have contained the four-letter words insouciantly sprinkled through the 1947 "Blind Assassin." "Nooky" and "tits and ass" might have got by, and by 1951 Salinger's "Catcher in the Rye" was to transcribe "fuck you" from a graffito, but Norman Mailer's "Naked and the Dead" had to settle, in 1948, for "fug." Obscene expressions coolly common now were then, in print, scandalously hot. Also, the little novel shines when cut up and snuggled into Atwood's larger narrative, but I could not quite believe that it would attract the cult following, of Plathian intensity, ascribed to it: phrases from it ("All Gods Are Carnivorous"—Laura Chase) appear in the women's lavatory at the doughnut shop, and Iris cannot visit Laura's grave without having to clear away flowers.

Atwood is commonly described as a feminist writer, and insofar as she favors female heroines and shows her women at a societal disavantage this seems just; but her viewpoint has not been unilateral or cramped by doctrine. She aspires to see genderized humanity whole. "The Handmaid's Tale," her portrait of a Taliban-style male tyranny, nevertheless manages to generate some sympathy for the heroine's personal oppressor, the Commander. Like a latter-day, fundamentalist Babbitt, he has a wistful, harried side, looking at moments "*sheepish* . . . the way men used to look"; the Handmaid allows, "He is not a monster, I think." The men in "The Blind Assassin," however, are pretty monstrous. Iris's father returns from the war dehumanized: "He's in his uniform; his medals are like holes shot in the cloth, through which the dull gleam of his real, metal body can be seen. . . . My father is wearing a black patch over his right eye. His left eye glares balefully. Underneath the patch, not yet revealed, is a web of scarred flesh, his missing eye the spider." Iris's next protector, her husband, is much worse—so coldly manipulative, so reflexively fascist in his politics, so brutal in his sexual behavior, so devoid of any attractive dimension, that she admits in her memoir, "I've failed to convey Richard, in any rounded sense. He remains a cardboard cutout." She evidently was never, not for a moment, responsive to him sexually, or interested in anything he said while they shared, night after night, "a drink or two before dinner, or three." Her indifference is almost an invitation to abuse. But even the unnamed hero of the novel within the novel, the unsleek, on-the-run chronicler of the planet Zycron, fails to emerge as lovable, though he is loved by the heroine. He feels alien, a more supple specimen of his invented invaders from space, the bare-chested Lizard Men of Xenor, "super-intelligent but super-cruel," with scaly vital parts "enormous . . . but at the same time vulnerable." The other side of the gender divide holds the Peach Women of Aa'A, luscious, compliant dream girls who grow on trees and whose perishability is announced by the appearance of fruit flies over their heads. When his Scheherazade mask slips, he is a male from Mars—curt, surly, ungrateful, harsh, remote. Here is a typical lovers' exchange:

> I worry about you, she says. I dream about it. I worry all the time.
>
> Don't worry, darling, he says. You'll get thin, and then your lovely tits and ass will waste away to nothing. You'll be no good to anybody then.
>
> She puts her hand up to her cheek as if he's slapped her. I wish you wouldn't talk like that.
>
> I know you do, he says. Girls with coats like yours do have those wishes.

Well, he is tense, an apologist might argue, and her sexual largesse and his fugitive poverty embarrass him. But the novel is less moving than it might be if we cannot share the heroine's sense of his charm, his worth. She contemplates the single photograph of them together, taken at a picnic, and claims, "The picture is of happiness, the story not. Happiness is a garden walled with glass: there's no way in or out."

The reader cannot get through the glass wall, either, which perhaps suits Atwood's message: the universe bears ill will; love and justice are both blind idols; God is a ruin. "It's loss and regret and misery and yearning that drive the story forward, along its twisted road." The novel gets us in its grip and then loosens it and leaves us feeling lost. Love, throughout, is in insufficient supply, and when it exists is usually in the wrong place. The cosmos above us and underneath our feet is void; in our poor neediness we are as carnivorous and blind as the gods. ◆



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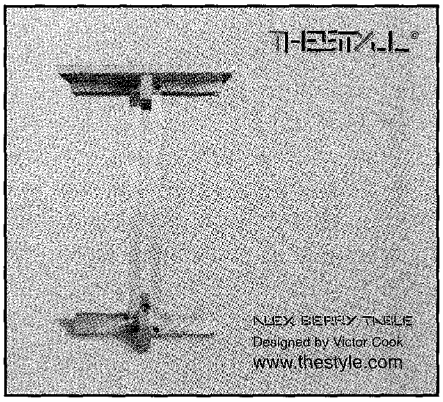

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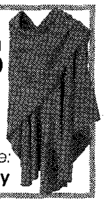

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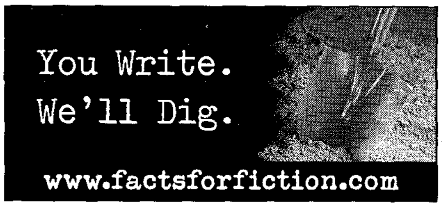

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BOOKS

SEX AND SENSIBILITY

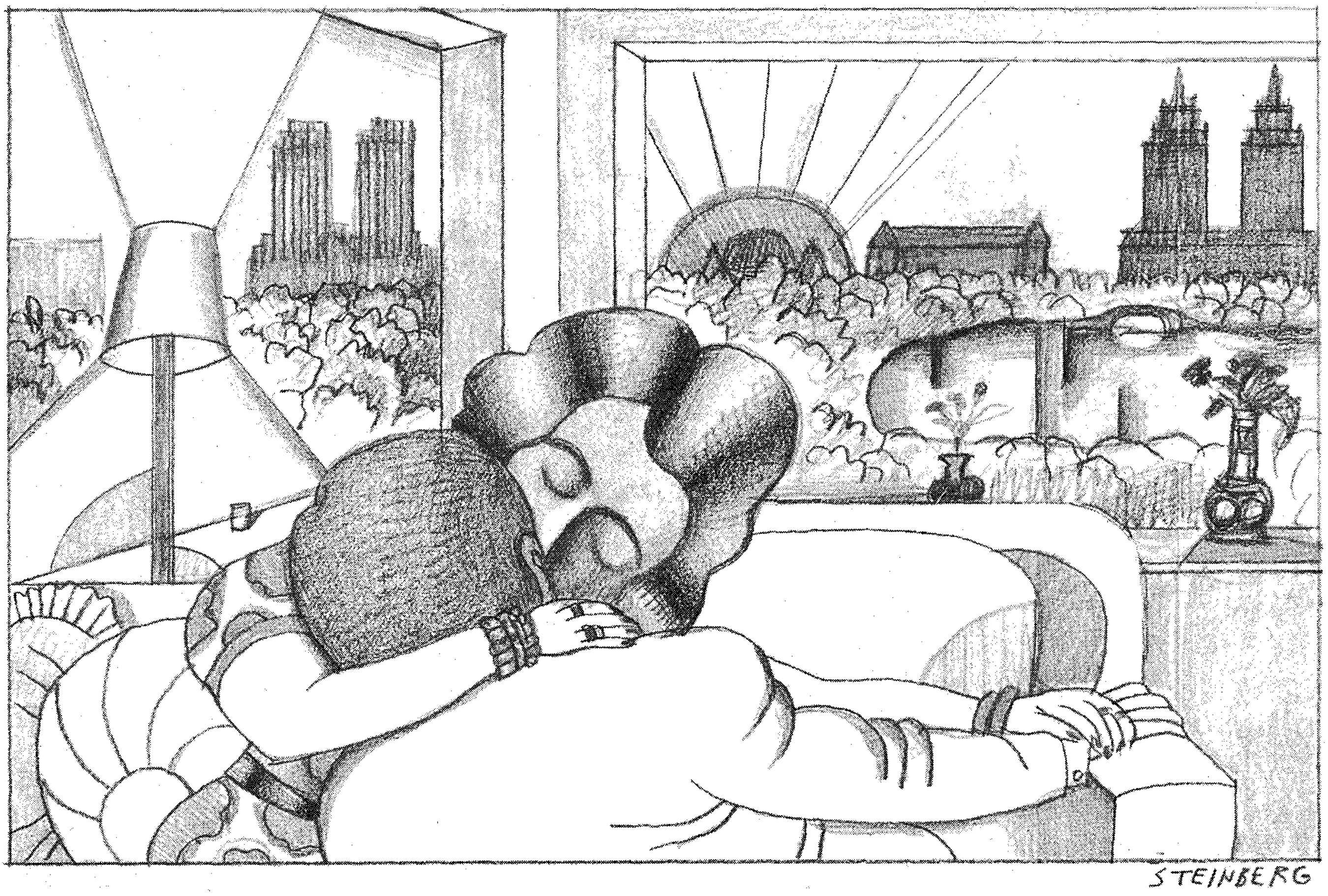
The histories of nymphomania and celibacy.

BY REBECCA MEAD

For three days last fall, six hundred physicians and psychologists gathered in a conference hall in Boston to discuss the female orgasm—perhaps the largest group of professionals ever to convene on the topic. Scientists and sex therapists from around the world presented their ongoing researches into the effect of Viagra on the vaginal tissue of rats and of pornographic stimulation on the intimate dimensions of female volunteers. Eros, a clitoral suction pump that has since received F.D.A. clearance, was among the products that were unveiled. There were some presentations that caused sniggering even among the seen-it-all scientists; one was by a French team who had introduced a copulating couple into an M.R.I. machine in an attempt to take precise anatomical measurements of the beast with two backs.

Since Viagra's début, two years ago, money has poured into medical research on female sexuality, a subject that had hitherto attracted few scientists and fewer investors. (The Boston conference was funded, in part, by Pfizer, the manufacturer of Viagra.) Among those in the lab-coat-wearing vanguard, you'll hear much bold talk that medical science is the new frontier of the sexual revolution; that the latest battle for equal rights for women is being fought with vasodilators and hormone patches. There is, some researchers have argued, a crisis in female sexuality; according to a report published last year in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, forty-three per cent of American women are sufficiently unhappy with their sex lives to be diagnosed as suffering from female sexual dysfunction, the symptoms of which may include a lack of interest in sex; the absence of arousal; an inability to reach orgasm; and pain or discomfort during intercourse or other sexual activity. A crucial defining characteristic of F.S.D. is that the diagnosis should be made only when the woman in question is herself unhappy with her sexual response, rather than when her husband complains that she is too slow to respond, as with older definitions of frigidity. Contemporary sex researchers are scrupulous about avoiding normative pronouncements about sex—how much is the right amount, and what it ought to feel like—and, as a result, F.S.D. is, to a large extent, a matter of self-diagnosis. A woman measures her own sex life against what she sees, or imagines, of the sex lives of women around her, and judges whether hers is all she'd like it to be.

One of the services of Carol Groneman's new book, "Nymphomania: A History" (Norton; $24.95), is to remind us that a woman's subjective expecta-



The concept of nymphomania has evolved over the years, but its function has always been to denigrate female desire.

tions of what her sex life should be are as mutable as the culture in which she lives. Groneman writes of a twenty-four-year-old middle-class Boston woman who, in 1856, sought medical help for her sexual inclinations, which she found disturbingly pronounced: she dreamed of men other than her husband, and was overwhelmed with erotic sensations during everyday conversations with men of her acquaintance. The prescribed course of treatment included twice-daily cold sponge baths, a daily cold enema, and the swabbing of her vagina with borax solution. (In addition, she was put on a bland diet; her feather bedding was replaced with hair; and she had to give up writing a novel on which she had been working.) She was not alone in seeking help for the relief of unbearable urges: Groneman quotes from a number of compelling case histories from around the same time, including a first-person account by a woman who was distraught that the clitoridectomy she had voluntarily undergone was inadequate to the job of diminishing her desire.

Groneman argues that the Victorian era, which is where she starts her readable, if somewhat abbreviated, history of nymphomania, was the occasion of a huge reversal in the popular understanding of the nature of female sexuality. Throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, she says, it was widely accepted that women were the lustier of the sexes; Tiresias' maxim that women take nine-tenths of the pleasure in lovemaking was common wisdom. With the dawning of the Enlightenment, and of its debates about the equality of all men, the question inevitably arose whether women were equally equal. Groneman argues that, in the interests of preserving the existing order, the medical establishment and the legal establishment sought arguments that demonstrated women's unfitness for parity with men, and did so by means of a wholly new conception of femininity: the domestic angel, whose only longings were for motherhood and submissive wifedom. In this context, female desire became pathologized as nymphomania, a term that, though it was infrequently applied, nonetheless underlay the assumptions of many doctors and patients.

In the early twentieth century, Groneman says, the emergence of a new kind of emancipated woman, one who demanded the right to vote and the right to work, gave rise to a new definition of nymphomania, in which it became not merely an appetite for too much sex but an appetite for the wrong kind of sex, in which the female was an active, even aggressive, partner. Paradoxically, nymphomania and frigidity became intertwined: the voracious appetite of the nymphomaniac was due to her perpetual dissatisfaction. The "new woman" could be dismissed as an angry, frustrated masturbator whose supposed sexual insatiability was the mark of her failure to accept or achieve true feminine happiness.

The next phase in the evolution of the nymphomaniac came as psychoanalysts, endocrinologists, and behaviorists got in on the act. Freudian theories about the primacy of the vaginal orgasm gained currency, with the result that women who found that their pleasures were rooted elsewhere were considered to be harboring unconscious, unnatural sexual aggression and hostility toward men. Mid-century scientists experimented with hormone treatments. Meanwhile, the former zoologist Alfred Kinsey was seeking to quantify and tabulate sexual behavior in humans in all its surprising variety. Groneman goes on to discuss Masters and Johnson, whose revelations in the sixties that in the beds of America anything went were a comfortable fit with the sexual-liberation movement of that decade; and she touches upon legal definitions of nymphomania, including a 1970 lawsuit involving a San Francisco woman who sought, and won, damages after a cable-car crash that, she claimed, left her perpetually hungry for sex. Groneman closes by arguing that in the current era the term "nymphomaniac" falls somewhere between a joke and a compliment, while a new term, "sex addict," has arisen to convey the notion of sexual exorbitance. (Interestingly, "sex addict" is more popularly applied to men than to women, which may be evidence that the sexes are being judged by the same standard, albeit only because the censoriousness that was once reserved for women is now being applied to men as well.)

Groneman's book is a brief survey of a complex subject; inevitably, it sometimes feels overcondensed. And, while she does an engaging job of picking apart the changing conceptions of nym-

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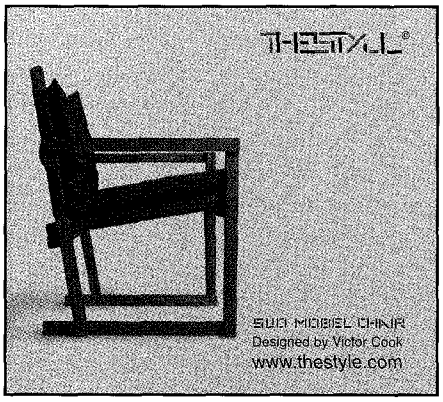
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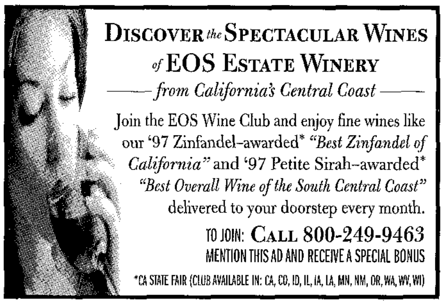
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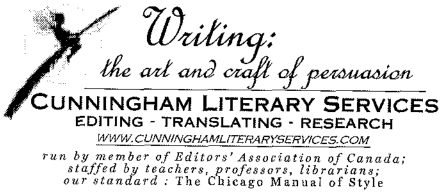
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phomania in past eras, there's more to be said about the current debate concerning women's sexual drives and desires. Groneman's own position about sexuality is a straightforwardly constructivist one: "Sexual desire . . . is not a simple, biological force in need of liberation. Age, upbringing, economic circumstances, ideology, religion, the historical moment, availability of a partner—in addition to one's body—all shape sexuality." But owing to the resurgence of evolutionary psychology, and to sex-related pharmacological developments, there's been a shift in emphasis away from sexuality as a cultural construct. Groneman might have addressed recent feminist-Darwinian interpretations of female sexual behavior, such as that of Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, who argued last year in her book "Mother Nature" that female promiscuousness might be motivated by the desire to insure that more than one male feels responsible to any offspring that result. And Groneman says nothing about the feminist debate currently taking place over the love-drug researches of companies like Pfizer. (Does the search for a female Viagra promise liberation for women? Or does a sex-enhancing drug for women mean that the larger cultural pressures inhibiting women can go unchanged, and that men can carry on being as oafish as they want to be?)

Nor does she address the question of whether the attention being paid to women's sexuality by the medical establishment and in the popular media might have the side effect of making women feel inadequately sexy. Currently, we're seeing a return of the pre-Victorian paradigm of female lasciviousness: women's magazines advocate sleeping around in articles such as "Six Guys to Do Before You Say 'I Do,' " and offer consumer advice on the best vibrators on the market. (A significant subgenre of sex articles has emerged in recent years, in which advice is dispensed to women whose boyfriends want less sex than they do.) The hypersexualization of contemporary culture means that finding one's place on the satisfaction-dissatisfaction continuum can be pretty confusing. With Angelina Jolie raving in the press about her sexual raptures with her new husband, Billy Bob Thornton, it's surprising that only forty-three per cent of American women report that they are suffering from female sexual dysfunction.

Groneman's book is as much a symptom of the current hypersexual mood as it is a critique; and so is Elizabeth Abbott's recent volume, "A History of Celibacy" (Scribner; $30), in which the author writes of modern-day chastity campaigns such as "True Love Waits," placing them in what she sees as a noble tradition of sex refusal. Abbott's book is a far more ambitious and wide-ranging history than Groneman's, though her subtitle, "From Athena to Elizabeth I, Leonardo da Vinci, Florence Nightingale, Gandhi, & Cher," is cravenly commercial. (Cher fans will be disappointed to see that she gets but a short paragraph, concerning her extended dry spell since breaking up with Richie Sambora, of Bon Jovi.) Abbott, who is a dean at the University of Toronto, devotes the largest part of her attention to Christian traditions of celibacy, but she considers farther-flung practices, too. We have Rome's vestal virgins, the keepers of the city's flame, who led lives of privilege so long as they remained chaste but were sealed in an underground cell to suffocate or starve to death if they strayed. We have St. Simeon Stylites, who spent years standing atop a sixty-foot pillar, from the vicinity of which all female temptation was banned. We have Arcangela Tarabotti, a seventeenth-century nun who, having been placed against her will in a convent by her father to avoid paying a dowry, wrote a furious screed called "Simplicity Betrayed." We have the nineteenth-century Inuit Igjugarjuk, who earned his post as village shaman by spending a month fasting, a month sitting in a snow hut on an exposed ledge, and a year abstaining from sexual relations with his wife. We have John Harvey Kellogg, with his sexless marriage and his daily enema administered by an orderly at his sanatorium. We have Gandhi, insisting on testing his chastity by sleeping with nubile bedmates snuggling alongside him. We have anorexic celibates, and eighteenth-century operatic castrati, and "lesbian bed death," and the chastity belt of flesh that is female genital mutilation. A tongue-in-cheek working title for the book was "The Kama Sutra of Celibacy": there are more ways of not having sex than you could dream of.

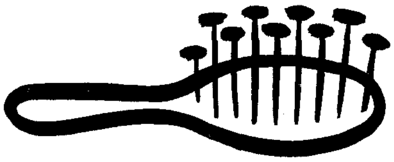
Though Abbott writes of celibacy among men, and even among the transgendered, like the *hijras* of India, her real interest is in women who choose to abstain. She makes a convincing case that throughout much of history celibacy, particularly institutional celibacy, was an attractive option for women. They were spared the repeated mortal danger of childbirth; they were exempt from the drudgery of a servile marriage; they might be beneficiaries of education that otherwise would have been reserved for their brothers; they even stood a chance of achieving power and influence within a church hierarchy. She has a particular soft spot for the thirteenth-century Beguines, whom she depicts as a kind of early women's movement in northern Europe. Determined to live apostolic lives, they dedicated themselves to chastity and poverty, and lived and worked among the needy. The Beguines were free agents: they were neither secular nor religious, and answered to no church hierarchy; inevitably, the church establishment found this intolerable and eventually ordered them into cloisters—supposedly for their own sexual protection. To Abbott, the Beguines are a sadly evanescent paradigm of powerful, self-sufficient womanhood, the riot grrls of the Middle Ages.

Abbott gives an account of her own embrace of celibacy, too. Post-childbearing and post-divorce, she found that it was thrust upon her; in writing the book, she says, she came to realize the value of choosing to channel one's libidinal energies in directions other than the genital. "Celibacy has major tangible benefits, namely respite from the time-consuming burdens of housewifery," she writes. "No longer do I need to plan, shop for, serve, and clean up after a week's meals, or iron the shirts I once foolishly boasted I could do better than the dry cleaner, or answer that infernal question 'Honey, where are my socks?' " But though Abbott may well be better off without a man who expects full maid service, it's odd to think that the complex connection with another that constitutes sexual love might simply be traded off against sock duty. What is particularly poignant about the unhappily lusty wife of Boston in Carol Groneman's "Nymphomania" is that she was motivated to visit her doctor by love of her husband, whom she was afraid of cuckolding. She wanted to find a balance between sex and socks; and so do most of us. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

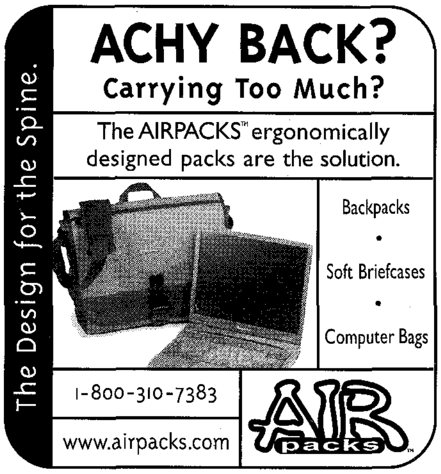
Winter Range, *by Claire Davis (Picador; $23).* Winters are hard on the eastern edge of Montana, and a couple of bad ones in a row can force a rancher to sell his herd. But Chas Stubblefield refuses to unload his cattle, or even to slaughter them; he is letting them starve to death out on the range as a reproach to the merchants, the banks, and God, who he believes has turned against him. Local wisdom dictates that property is property: if Stubblefield wants to lose his reputation along with his farm, that's his business. But Ike Parsons, the sheriff, is an outsider, and he decides to intervene—a decision that has dire consequences for both his marriage and his community. This fine first novel—part thriller, part love story—explores the gradations between pity and mercy. With lyrical precision (the steam rises off coyotes' backs in the freezing fields "like smoke from snuffed candles"; a Bronco's tires sluice "a rooster tail of grit and snow"), Davis describes a way of life in which actions are more eloquent than words.

Eduard's Homecoming, *by Peter Schneider, translated from the German by John Brownjohn (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25).* A Stanford geneticist returns to his native Berlin to begin a new job and claim a surprise inheritance—an apartment building formerly on the eastern side of the Wall. But the place is occupied by anarchist squatters, and Schneider turns his protagonist's comical uncertainty about how to proceed into a nuanced meditation on the political and ideological tumult of German reunification. Here scientists tread carefully lest their work appear to confirm Nazi precepts; the polemic of poets who oppose the G.D.R.'s regime is celebrated for its literary value; and capitalist carpetbaggers rush to exploit former Communists. Through Schneider's compassion, we're shown how a self-loathing population, reluctant to confront its own history, might still have some hope of reinventing itself.



Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan, *by Herbert P. Bix (HarperCollins; $35).* In 1945, fearing that the Japanese would resist American occupation unless the Emperor ordered them to obey, General MacArthur colluded with Hirohito in maintaining that the sovereign had been powerless to control Japan's military leaders—that they, not he, were responsible for the country's aggression and atrocities. However, Bix, an American academic who teaches in Japan, uses newly available sources to argue that Hirohito was a war criminal. An imperialist whose policies reflected his belief in the racial superiority of the Japanese, Hirohito governed by manipulation for almost two decades, and used the threat of Soviet Communism to justify domestic repression and soaring military budgets. The author's virtuoso scholarship and accessible narrative invite us into Hirohito's world and change the way we think of recent history; his portrayal of a monarch rationalizing evil is superb.

Marcel Proust, *by Jean-Yves Tadié, translated from the French by Euan Cameron (Viking; $40).* Besides providing a comprehensive and coherent overview of Proust's life, this fastidious yet readable biography contains anecdotes and minutiae that may surprise even a dedicated fan. For instance, one of the titles that Proust considered for "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu" was "In the Presence of Some Stalactites from Days Gone By"; he occasionally wrote newspaper articles under pseudonyms such as "Bob"; and once, in a rage, he grabbed a friend's new hat, trampled it, tore it up, and sent a piece of its lining to his own mother—a wrinkle in the conventional portrait of the artist as a mama's boy. The sheer breadth of Tadié's research can occasionally feel overwhelming, but at the same time his familiarity with Proust's life and work enables him to reject the *idées reçues* that have shaped his subject's legend.



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THE THEATRE

THE DEATH OF KINGS

In a political season, Shakespeare and Ralph Fiennes raise questions of leadership.

BY JOHN LAHR

"The higher the monkey climb the tree, the more you see of his behind." This cautionary folk adage perfectly sums up the appeal of Shakespeare's "Richard II" and "Coriolanus," two contrasting studies in political meltdown, which arrive from London's vivacious Almeida Theatre for a limited engagement at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (until October 1st and September 30th, respectively), just in time to rescue the opinion-saturated election-year American public from brain death. Four hundred years ago, Shakespeare was meditating eloquently on issues that are still much debated in our own noisy republic—issues of political savvy, good government, presentational style, and, most contentious of all to the Elizabethan citizen, the "will of the people." Richard II, a man of sensibility but no political sense, loses his throne; Coriolanus, a warrior who believes in the patrician regard for prowess and not in the democratic respect for consensus, undermines his own potential greatness as a leader. These disparate tragic roles are both taken on by Ralph Fiennes, whose swashbuckling good looks and sharp intelligence lend more than a matinée idol's presence to the performances.

In London, the shows—the brainchild of the Almeida's co-artistic director, Jonathan Kent, who produced and directed—were the summer's hottest tickets. They arrive here, however, without their secret weapon and biggest star—the cavernous, brooding atmosphere of the rough-hewn former soundstage of the Gainsborough Studio, in Shoreditch, which gave these otherwise old-fashioned repertory productions a thrilling sense of eventfulness. At Gainsborough, perched four tiers high, audiences looked down onto Paul Brown's muscular set, from whose brick back wall a large floor-to-ceiling chunk has been gouged out and lit up—an architectural scar that comes to represent the punishing divisions in each play's discontented society. For "Richard II," the foreground of the stage is covered with real grass, and Richard actually makes his entrance through the crevice. To this play, especially, the behemoth Gainsborough space lent an unusual novelty and an unforgettable sense of immediacy.

Richard II, the first English king to require his subjects to call him "Majesty," is presented by Shakespeare as a victim of his vainglory. With his delicate hands seeming to float in the air around him, Fiennes captures Richard's effete weakness, but his triumph is one of perspiration rather than of inspiration. We first encounter Richard in a scene in which he makes use of his royal power (an act for which he mints the verb "to monarchize") to resolve a hectoring quarrel between two nobles of the realm, Bolingbroke and Mowbray. Surrounded by a flattering court and indulged in his capriciousness by the public's acceptance of his divine right, he does so with an impolitic, Draconian flourish: Mowbray is banished forever, and the popular Bolingbroke (the excellent Linus Roache, who is strangely tentative in this role) is exiled for six years. To Shakespeare, this is not so much a show of Richard's frivolity as an example of his bad judgment. Later, Richard again misreads the political landscape; in an attempt to finance incursions into Ireland, he seizes the property of the banished Bolingbroke—"his plate, his goods, his money, and his lands." The King is a turkey who has just earned himself an early Christmas. His action rallies the nobles against him, emboldens Bolingbroke to return with an army, and insures Richard's infamy as a "most degenerate" ruler.

Despite his omnipotence ("Is not the king's name twenty thousand names? /

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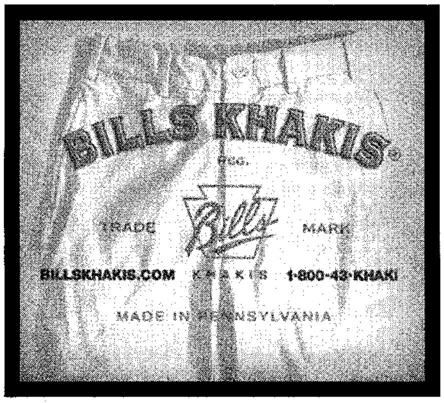

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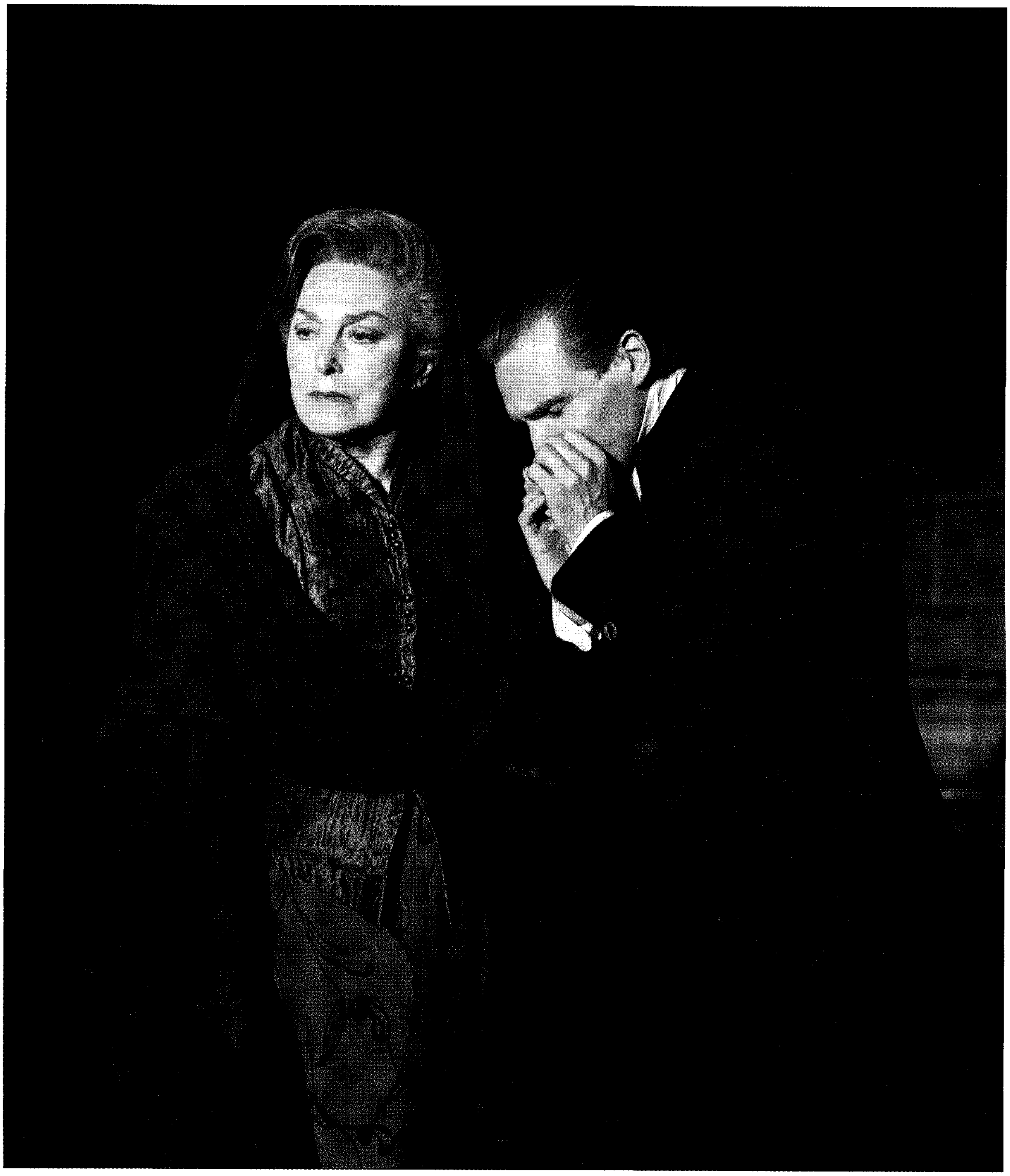
Arm, arm, my name!"), Richard has no understanding of his subjects and sees no reason to play to them. Bolingbroke, on the other hand, is a masterful politician, whose "courtship to the common people" is a spectacle of stage-managed humility; instead of setting himself apart through a show of power, he draws the masses to him by selling them the illusion of equality. Richard's regal imagination boggles at Bolingbroke's lumpen performance: "How he did seem to dive into their hearts / With humble and familiar courtesy; / What reverence he did throw away on slaves, / Wooing poor craftsmen with the craft of smiles / And patient underbearing of his fortune." But Richard has yet to learn the first rule of political life: you don't win the public's heart by showing it your backside. He pays a high price for his ignorance. Most of the play follows the trajectory of Richard II's decline: his capture, his surrender, his imprisonment, and his death.

Shakespeare is as interested in the



"There's no man in the world more bound to 's mother": Fiennes and Jefford in "Coriolanus." Photograph by Brigitte Lacombe.

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rise of the new political man—embodied by Bolingbroke—as he is in the fall of the old. Bolingbroke understands the concept of politics as theatre. He knows that public life is designed to be seen by others. At the moment of the transfer of royal power from Richard to him, he says, "Fetch hither Richard, that in common view / He may surrender. So we shall proceed / Without suspicion." And, at the finale, after the King is murdered, Shakespeare shows us Bolingbroke upbraiding the underling who killed him: "Though I did wish him dead, / I hate the murderer." Shakespeare ends the play cynically, with a display of the gap between public hyperbole and private behavior. Vowing a pilgrimage to purify his guilty soul and ordering his entourage to don their mourning clothes, Bolingbroke also stage-directs his followers in their final charade of grief: "March sadly after," he says. "Grace my mournings here / In weeping after this untimely bier."

By the end of his life, Richard II has learned wisdom and humility ("I wasted time, and now doth time waste me"), and this development makes the play ultimately more satisfying than "Coriolanus," whose hero learns virtually nothing from his hardships. Fiennes, who can find no humor in the character of Coriolanus, mines instead the innumerable postures of hauteur; in ankle-length overcoat and slicked-back hair, he conveys a certain sneering severity, but there is no sense of the heroic in his voice or in his bearing.

Coriolanus is a kind of Shakespearean Schwarzenegger, an ancient killing machine. He cuts through enemies like "a harvest-man that's tasked to mow," reaping glory for himself and domination for Rome. His ferocity and contempt—so essential in battle—sow only dissension and distrust at home among the citizens, whom he abominates as "fragments" and "crows to peck the eagles." Coriolanus can neither abide nor cater to the masses; after his great victory against the Volscians, he only reluctantly wears "a gown of humility" in order to be elected to the consulship. "The tongues o' th' common mouth / I do despise them," he says. "For they do prank them in authority / Against all noble sufferance." Democracy is all talk; he is all endeavor. He won't be bound by any authority save his own, and at no time is this clearer than when the citizens banish him as a traitor. Coriolanus refuses their judgment. As he leaves Rome, he declares, "I banish you!," then adds, "I turn my back. / There is a world elsewhere." Coriolanus joins the enemy Volscians and his former rival, Tullus Aufidius (the swaggering Linus Roache, in better form), and threatens to destroy his ungrateful former empire.

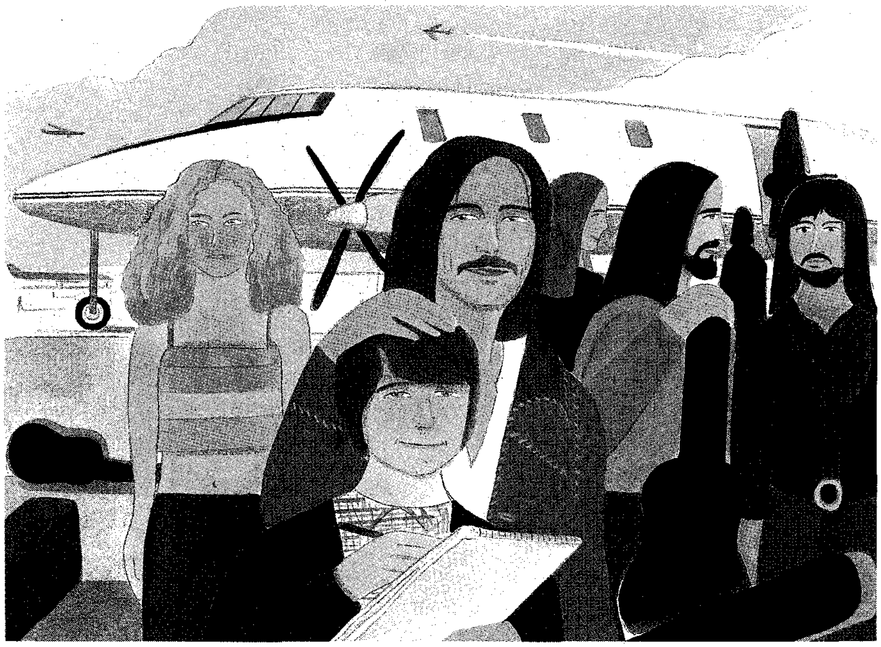
The ambiguities of "Coriolanus" have lent themselves to many interpretations. In Nazi Germany, for instance, the play was seen as a call for strong leadership. (Consequently, the Allies banned it until 1953.) In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, "Coriolanus" was read, through a Stalinist lens, as a representation of the betrayal of the masses by an individualistic leader. Perhaps in keeping with the bland spirit of New Labour dithering, Jonathan Kent's direction imposes no point of view at all. Despite a compelling performance by the statuesque Barbara Jefford as Volumnia, Coriolanus's war-mongering mother ("Anger's my meat, I sup upon myself"), Kent seems unwilling to risk interpreting the crucial psychology between mother and son. "There's no man in the world / More bound to 's mother," Volumnia says. "I have lived / To see inherited my very wishes / And the buildings of my fancy." Although Shakespeare seems to imply that Coriolanus's stiff-necked pride and fury are due to his mother's attention—"My praises made thee first a soldier," Volumnia tells her son—in this production, extraordinarily, mother and son have no emotional connection. As a result, at the finale, in which Volumnia persuades her intractable son to spare Rome (and in doing so causes his death), Coriolanus's submission seems arbitrary, and Volumnia's ace—to withhold her praise—is played like a deuce. Although he handles crowd scenes well, Kent can't come to grips with the subtlety of private moments. His stagings, like Fiennes's performances, are admirable without being exceptional; they are full of showy flourishes, at once waving and drowning. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

GROWING UP

In rock and roll and in the French coal country.

BY DAVID DENBY



Kate Hudson, Billy Crudup, and Patrick Fugit (front) in "Almost Famous."

GEOFFREY PARKER

Cameron Crowe's "Almost Famous"—a quasi-autobiographical account of his life and not very hard times as a fifteen-year-old rock-and-roll journalist—is likable enough, a movie that unfolds with an easy affection for its scene and its characters, but the picture is awfully mild, and even a little amorphous. For years, the talented writer-director of "Say Anything," "Singles," and "Jerry Maguire" was eager to tell his story, but now that he's told it I'm not sure that he had anything to say—except that he had very, very good fortune as a young man. It turns out that the boy had not one but two angels presiding over his passage to adulthood. The first was his mom, Elaine (Frances McDormand), a college professor fighting the counterculture. Fiercely literal, Elaine stuffs her kids' heads with literature, information, ethical passion. It's 1973, and she hates the idea of her precious child hanging out with rockers and groupies. McDormand tenses her shoulders, as if she were fighting off an Arctic chill, and gives an abrupt, eccentric performance as a morally fortified woman who's too loving to suppress her boy's talents. Against her better judgment, Elaine lets William (as he's called) leave both school and their home in San Diego. He's got an assignment from *Rolling Stone* to cover a struggling band named Stillwater, and, before he leaves, William (Patrick Fugit) meets his second angel—the real-life rock critic Lester Bangs (Philip Seymour Hoffman). A virtuoso stylist who edited *Creem* for a number of years and also wrote for *Rolling Stone* and the *Village Voice*, Bangs hangs out in a diner with William, an ardent, freckle-faced music lover, and immediately recognizes a true talent. He dazzles the kid with his interest and then flatters him with his extravagant disillusion.

According to Bangs, the heroic age of rock is over. By 1973, it's all corruption and corporate greed, and William will be seduced by friendly hucksters offering booze and girls. A romantic perfectionist, Bangs wants rock to be art, revolution—everything. He's very severe, but what could be more exciting for a young critic than being en-

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trusted with the news that life and art suck?

William hits the road with the band, and falls into an intense admiration for the lead guitarist, Russell (Billy Crudup), a good-looking, remote demi-icon who treats William with great kindness. Or so it seems; Crudup, a reticent actor, offers a slight, disappearing smile that may be intended as a seductive tease. Russell knows what any smart celebrity knows—that journalists suffer from the nagging fear that they are just hangers-on, and want desperately to be recognized for their personal qualities. The real hangers-on—a trio of groupies called the Band Aids—aren't expected to have any personal qualities. Led by Russell's road girlfriend, Penny Lane (Kate Hudson), they service the band and make a pleasant fuss over William, tickling his erotic curiosity. Kate Hudson is lit from behind, which brings out a golden-seraph sheen in her blond hair, and in her lace tank tops and diaphanous skirts she's ambiguously alluring. As Crowe tells it, she's not a baby whore (she gives herself only to Russell) but a girlfriend with soul and social abilities—more a hostess and party-maker than a sex toy. She's also nice to William, who falls for her. But is Crowe idealizing some mysterious young woman who was sweet to him long ago? How many mothers does a boy need? When his actual mother calls, one of the Band Aids tells her, "Don't worry, he's still a virgin. We're all looking out for him," and this is the truth. The rock scene turns out to be much less dangerous than Elaine imagines. This is amusing, but it's not a dramatic irony—it's more like a footnote.

There are brief concert scenes, and good times on the bus, and lots of quarrelling, and at times Crowe seems to be satirizing rock life, as Rob Reiner did in "This Is Spinal Tap." Jason Lee (from "Chasing Amy") plays the lead singer, who fears he's losing control of the band to Russell, and Lee, bearded and petulant, his nose in the air, lets fly with ranting, egotistical tirades. He's meant to be a no-talent phony, but Russell, who's supposed to be the real thing, acts like a jerk, too—getting stoned at a house party in Topeka and turning a light switch on and off as if the flashing bulbs were a revelation of the cosmos. "You're real. You're what it's all about," he tells the happy crowd of Topeka teens, and he jumps off a roof into a swimming pool. Crowe's point of view is unstable: we can't get a hold on Russell, a character now decent and talented, now casually vicious or emotionally absent. He trades Penny Lane away in a card game with some other rockers, and Crudup doesn't yield a clue as to what Russell is feeling—or not feeling. Crudup has some talent, but if he doesn't drop the Mona Lisa act soon and give more of himself to the camera, he's not going to make it as a star.

The band and its entourage become William's family, and they do, finally, get him laid, though Crowe just glides over the moment, as if it were his first cigarette. Eager yet parched, we look for a little excitement. But William's mentor, Lester Bangs, never bullies him, and never turns on him, which makes him an improbable saint among mentors. In all, William is not placed in enough danger—morally, spiritually, sexually, or any other way—to become a hero for us, and after a while we may wonder what's at stake in this movie. It certainly isn't the music. No one refutes Bangs's charge that rock has collapsed as an art form, and we're not meant to have any illusions about Stillwater, which is just another midlevel seventies band. The plot turns on a peculiar point of honor. William is grateful for his easy time with the band, but if he writes a puff piece *Rolling Stone* won't publish it; on the other hand, if he betrays his friends and writes a candid, aggressive article about a struggling bunch of egotists, he has a cover story. The issue is presented as a moral dilemma, though Crowe makes it clear that writing a tough piece is also a terrific career move (it's one of the unusual cases in life in which integrity pays off). Journalists will recognize what's at stake, but the dilemma can't be a big deal for civilians—at least, not the way it is portrayed here, where the turning point passes much too quickly and casually. "Almost Famous" is underdramatized and irres-

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olute. Looking back on his salad days, Crowe seems caught between nostalgia and satire, between appreciation and disappointment. There's no reason for him to resolve his feelings, but for us to experience them as he does he needs to intensify them much more than he has done in "Almost Famous."

Bertrand Tavernier's "It All Starts Today" ("Ça Commence Aujourd'hui") is a fictional portrait of a great, embattled teacher, but, unlike the many American films that have glorified teachers in charged situations, it's not a tearjerker. The teacher, Daniel (Philippe Torreton), a thirty-fivish director of a kindergarten who writes poetry on the side, has a short temper and a considerable ego, and he suffers defeats as well as victories. Tavernier wrote the film with his daughter, Tiffany, and with Dominique Sampiero (an actual teacher-poet), and he doesn't shape the material for melodramatic punch—struggle leading to triumph and vindication—as a commercial American director would. Tavernier's approach is looser, more anecdotal, and alternately lyrical and bleak; he moves swiftly from one moment to the next, wheeling the camera down halls, or after parents or teachers. The movie has rhythm and pace, which, God knows, are nearly impossible to achieve in any film set in a school. The institution in question here is an *école maternelle* in Hernaing, in the north of France, an industrial area in which the coal mines have shut down and unemployment has reached thirty-four per cent. The people on Daniel's staff seem highly dedicated, but they are facing the accumulated problems of poverty—alcoholic and irresponsible parents, abused children withdrawing into themselves—and they are stuck cleaning up the messes. In response, the fantastically alert Daniel brings the maximum of pressure and commitment to every moment. Driven forward by the energy of this moody dynamo, "It All Starts Today" is high-minded but impassioned and fluent. It helps enormously that Philippe Torreton is mesmerizing onscreen, and that Daniel has a sensational-looking and tempestuous girlfriend (Maria Pitarresi). The movie, which offers a very French mixture of brusqueness and tenderness, manages to suggest, without excessive sentiment, that gifted people, whatever their failures, make an enormous difference to anyone lucky enough to be caressed or bruised by them. ♦

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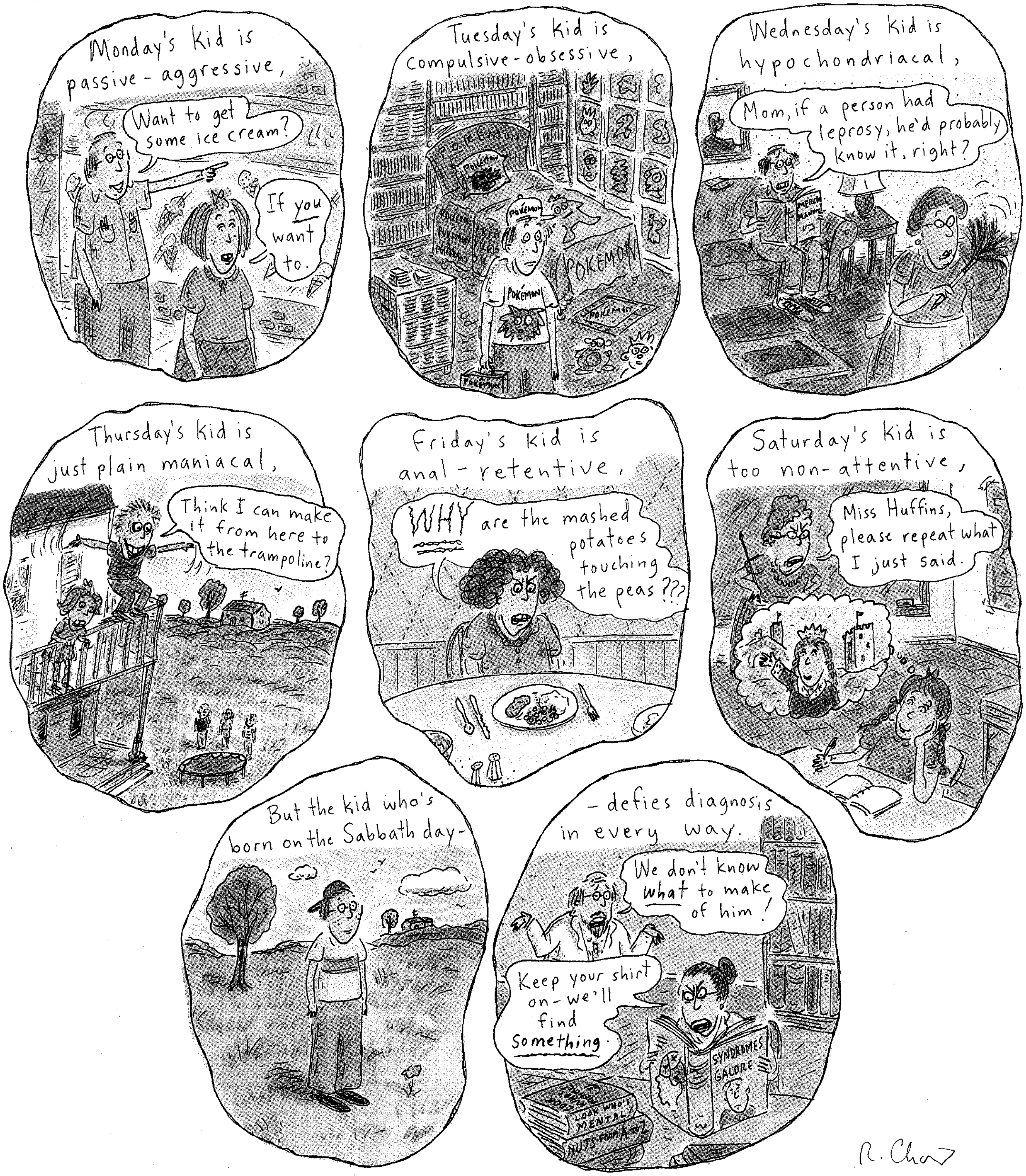
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WHY are the mashed potatoes touching the peas???
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